Classical Telugu Poetry

AN ANTHOLOGY

TRANSLATED, EDITED, AND

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman

Classical Telugu Poetry

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We dedicate this book to our mothers

Velcheru Venkubayamma
Deana Krantman Shulman

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This anthology opens a window to a thousand years of classical poetry in Telugu, the mellifluous language of Andhra Pradesh in southern India. The classical tradition in Telugu is one of the richest, most original, and least explored of all South Asian literatures. We hope this collection will bring the world of Telugu poetry to the awareness of a wider audience of aficionados, connoisseurs, and scholars.

An introductory essay sets out our understanding of the evolving structure and dynamics of this tradition from its beginnings in the eleventh century to the twentieth century, when classical styles were gradually transformed and replaced by modern modes. We have attempted a synthesis that reflects our own work of the past two decades but that also stands firmly on the foundations laid by great Telugu scholars of this century: Vedamu Venkatarayasastri, Manavalli Ramakrishnakavi, Veturi Prabhakara Sastri, Rallapalli Anantakrishnasarma, Arudra, Bommakanti Srinivasacaryulu, Bommakanti Venkatasingaracarya, Balantrapu Nalinikantaravu, Bh. Krishnamurti, and others. Our debt to these pioneering scholars is profound.

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Jerusalem and Madison
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NOTE ON PRONUNCIATION

Long vowels are double the length of short vowels. The Sanskrit diphthongs *e, o, ai,* and *au* are always long and are unmarked; we mark the short Dravidian vowels *ĕ* and *ŏ*. Sanskrit names ending in a long vowel, appearing in Telugu texts, are consistently marked as short, in keeping with Telugu practice: Sīta < Sītā, Draupadi < Draupadī. Long vowels resulting from sandhi combinations, except for diphthongs, are marked with ˆ. The consonant sounds *ṭ, ḍ, ṭh, ḍh, ṇ,* and *ḷ* are retroflex, pronounced by turning the tip of the tongue back toward the palate.

In transliterating Telugu text, we have improvised a mark for plosives voiced after a nasal (*drutamu:* whether the nasal is a *sunna* or an *arasunna* or in its *svatva-rūpa*). A line under the plosive indicates the reciter has an option of pronouncing it as either voiced or unvoiced, according to context or convention of recitation. For suffixes following upon an infinitive, we reproduce the Telugu orthography. When for other reasons an unvoiced plosive turns voiced, we follow Telugu graphic conventions.

No diacritics are used for the names of modern authors.

Introduction

A TELUGU WORLD

mahi mun vāg-anuśāsanuṇḍu sṛjiyimpan ḳuṇḍalîndruṇḍu ṭan-
mahanīya-sthiti-mūlamai niluva śrīnāthuṇḍu provan mahā-
mahulai somuḍu bhāskaruṇḍu vĕlayimpan sŏmpu vāṭillun ī
bahuḷândhrokti-maya-prapañcamuna tat-prāgalbhyam′ ūhiñcĕdan

Live the exuberance of language,
first created by the Maker of Speech.
A thousand tongues at the root,
moon and sun above,
God himself within:
a whole world inheres
in what Telugu says.[1]

This verse by the sixteenth-century poet Rāmarājabhūṣaṇa celebrates a vital and continuous literary tradition, fully formed and mature, in the language of Andhra in southern India. The poet, working at a historic moment of intense creativity in Telugu, points to a canon already in place. Each poet is paronomastically identified with a divinity. First there is Vāg-anuśāsanuṇḍu, the Maker of Speech—Brahmā, in the classical Hindu pantheon—who has both created and married the goddess Vāc, Language or Speech. Within the Telugu tradition, however, this is also the title given to the first poet Nannaya (eleventh century), who established the contours of poetry and poetic style. The thousand tongues belong to the serpent Kundalîndruṇḍu-Ādiśeṣa, who holds the world on his thousand hoods; Ādiśeṣa is also the underlying

1. Rāmarājabhūṣaṇa, *Vasu-caritramu* (Madras: Vavilla Ramasvamisastrulu and Sons, n.d.), 1.10.

identity of the great Sanskrit grammarian Patañjali, author of the famous commentary on Pāṇini's foundational *sūtras.*[2] After the creation of speech itself, one needs grammar at the root of language. But the same title applies to the second great Telugu poet, Tikkana, who is said to have performed a sacrifice known as *kuṇḍali* (thus explaining his title here). The moon, Soma, is probably Nācana Somanātha, the author of the Telugu *[Uttara-]harivaṃśamu* (fourteenth century).[3] Bhāskara, the sun, is Huḷakki Bhāskara, who produced a Telugu *Rāmāyaṇa* (late thirteenth to early fourteenth centuries). And God himself, the Lord of Prosperity, is Śrīnātha, the fourteenth-century poet who revolutionized Telugu taste. Together, and also no doubt accompanied by other, unnamed poets, these figures created and maintained—in the eyes of the poet who sang this verse—an entire universe, rich with life and feeling, fashioned in and by language. And it is to this language, imagined as a goddess, that the poet pays tribute.

Our anthology attempts to represent, in a modest way, the world of Telugu poetry as imagined by poets such as Rāmarājabhūṣaṇa. We present selections from each of the major poets over a period of some nine centuries, from the eleventh to the nineteenth, on the verge of modern times (although in some sense the classical tradition has continued in Andhra into the twentieth century).[4] Perhaps something of the integrity of this literary world and the striking originality of its makers will come through the distance of time and language. In the following pages we offer a synoptic overview of the Telugu literary tradition, pausing to consider certain key figures in detail.

BEGINNINGS

Telugu literature begins with Nannaya, but Telugu language is much more ancient, attested in place names from as early as the second century A.D. Prose inscriptions from the middle of the first millennium show a gradual evolution toward the classical language. Verse and the appearance of a literary style are attested in inscriptions from the late ninth century on (or even earlier: the Turimĕḷḷa inscription of Vikramâditya I, in the seventh century, is sometimes seen as already marked by a "high" style).[5] Early references to

2. For a seventeenth-century version of the story identifying Patañjali with the serpent, see Rāmabhadra Dīkṣita, *Patañjali-caritra* (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar Press, 1934).

3. The original title was probably *Harivaṃśamu;* later generations prefixed *Uttara-* to distinguish his work from Ĕr̲r̲āpragaḍa's *Harivaṃśamu.*

4. Surprisingly, one of the great modern poets, Viśvanātha Satyanārāyaṇa (d. 1976), continued the classical tradition directly. See the concluding section of this introduction, p. 51.

5. See Korada Mahadeva Sastri, *Historical Grammar of Telugu with Special Reference to Old Telugu, ca. 200 B.C.—1000 A.D.* (Anantapur: Sri Venkateswara University, 1969), 35–36; Bh. Krishnamurti, "Shift of Authority in Written and Oral Texts: The Case of Telugu," in *Syllables of*

the language call it Āndhra-bhāṣā[6] or Tĕnugu or Tĕlugu:[7] the etymology of the latter term has been much debated, with some tenaciously arguing for a Sanskrit folk-etymology from *triliṅga,* the land of the three *liṅgas,*[8] and others deriving it from caste or tribal names (Tĕlĕgas, Tĕlāganya).[9] Most probably the name is related to the Dravidian root *tĕṉ*, "south"; thus, Telugu would be the southern language, in contrast to Sanskrit or any of the Prakrits.[10] Telugu is classed as Dravidian and is thus a sister language to Tamil, the oldest attested Dravidian language, with a continuous literary tradition going back at least to the first century A.D. The cultural presence of Tamil radiated northward into Andhra from very early times: Nannaya seems aware of a great tradition of Tamil poetry,[11] and the powerful forces of Tamil religion, with its concomitant institutional features, unquestionably played a major role in the history of Telugu culture. It is also important to acknowledge that Telugu crystallized as a distinct literary tradition *after* the full maturation of Sanskrit erudition, including the domains of poetic theory, grammar, social ideology, scholastic philosophy, and so on. Unlike Tamil, which absorbed Sanskrit texts and themes in a slow process of osmosis and adaptation over more than a thousand years, Telugu must have swallowed Sanskrit whole, as it were, even before Nannaya. The enlivening presence of Sanskrit is everywhere evident in Andhra civilization, as it is in the Telugu language: every Sanskrit word is potentially a Telugu word as well, and literary texts in Telugu may be lexically Sanskrit or Sanskritized to an enormous degree, perhaps sixty percent or more. Telugu speech is also rich in Sanskrit loans, although the semantics of Sanskrit in Telugu are entirely distinctive. We will return to this theme.

Sky, ed. D. Shulman (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 80–81, referring also to the Vijayavada inscription of Yuddhamala, c. 989.

6. Thus, Ketana in his *Āndhra-bhāṣā-bhūṣaṇamu,* thirteenth century.

7. See Nannaya, *Āndhra-mahābhāratamu* (Hyderabad: Andhra Pradesh Sahitya Akademi, 1970), 1.1.26. We cannot say when Andhra and Telugu were first identified as linguistic terms.

8. Supposedly Kāḷahasti in the south, Śrīśailam to the west, and Dakṣārāma in the northern delta. Vidyānātha (fourteenth century) identifies the "country called Triliṅga" as the region marked by the three great shrines of Dakṣārāma, Śrīśaila, and Kāḷeśvaram (Kāḷahasti? Adilabad?); see Vidyānātha, *Pratāpa-rudra-yaśo-bhūṣaṇam* (Madras: The Sanskrit Education Society, 1979), 3.5.22. Recently a derivation has been proposed from *tri-kaliṅga,* the "three Kaliṅgas"; see K. C. Gandhi Babu, "Origin of the Word Telugu," *Proceedings of the Andhra Pradesh History Congress, 11th Session* (Nagaram, 1987), 52–55. In any case, it seems likely that the medieval term *tri-liṅga [desa]* derives indirectly from *tri-kaliṅga* and that the association with the three Śaiva shrines is secondary.

9. Perhaps linked to the geographical term Tĕlaṅgāṇa.

10. Cf. Tamil *tĕṉ-mōḻi,* the southern language, to refer to itself, as opposed to *vaṭa-mōḻi,* the northern language, Sanskrit.

11. Nannaya, 1.1.24 (see selection in the anthology, p. 60).

Already, however, we begin to sense the richly composite nature of the Telugu world. One might think of Andhra as one of the great internal frontier zones of South Indian civilization and at the same time, as such, a melting-pot—a domain of intense interaction among rival cultural currents, with their associated social and historical formations. It is not simple to isolate the various currents or to date their appearance in Andhra history, and one must bear in mind that much of the prehistory—before Nannaya—is hardly known. Still, there are some things that can be said in a general and perhaps slightly abstract manner.

The frontier is structured, in part, along geographic lines. Andhra is divided in three: (1) the coastal zone (Andhra proper), largely deltaic, especially to the north, where the Godāvarī and Kṛṣṇā Rivers flow into the Bay of Bengal (as elsewhere in South India, the delta is associated with heavy Brahmin settlement and influence); (2) Tĕlaṅgāṇa, the dry Deccan plateau, home to peasants, artisans, and warriors; and (3) Rāyalasīma ("the royal domain"), the southern reaches of this plateau, tapering off into the mixed ecological regions of northern Tamil Nadu.[12] In early medieval times, Rāyalasīma was apparently far more fertile than it is today. But even the fertile delta to the north was largely wilderness beyond the immediate proximity of the great rivers; this situation changed dramatically only in the nineteenth century, when the major anicuts were created, thus opening up vast areas for rice cultivation. In medieval times the wild drylands of the interior, peopled by shepherds, artisans, warriors, and a growing proportion of agriculturists, were bound up linguistically, culturally, and sometimes politically with the hardly less untamed but wetter regions of coast and delta.

Andhra history and culture reflect the constant interplay of these ecologically distinct zones, especially of the delta and the Deccan, with cultural innovation often emerging in the latter to be reshaped and domesticated in the former. Over time, ever more serious attempts at integration were in evidence as states based in one region spilled over into, or attempted to absorb, political units rooted in the other areas. Early Andhra history, just this side of prehistory, reveals a Deccan-based kingdom, that of the Sātavāhanas, represented mostly by inscriptions in Prakrit, with only tenuous linkages to the coast. The early state structures in coastal Andhra (especially to the north, in the region known as Vengi) culminated in the rule of the Eastern Chāḷukyas, who eventually married into the Chola system in the Tamil south. Under the Chāḷukya king Rājarājanarendra, Telugu literature as we know it began, with the poet Nannaya. By the thirteenth century, the center of Telugu state-

12. See discussion on Senji in V. Narayana Rao, D. Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance, Court and State in Nāyaka Period Tamilnadu* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 41–44.

building had shifted to the Deccan plateau under the Kākatīyas, who brought massive tank irrigation to the dry zone and instituted creative forms of military organization based on personal loyalty to the king or queen.[13] Key patterns of Telugu culture were established during this period and later adopted and creatively reworked by the successor-states, including the Vijayanagara super-state based in Hampi, to the west of historic Andhra.

To what extent do these relatively distinct regional-ecological systems combine in awareness to form a single cultural entity—Andhra, as we think of it today? How old is such an awareness? The great poet Tikkana, in the thirteenth century, is apparently the first to refer to an imagined community named Andhra (*andhrâvaḷi*),[14] but the boundaries of this community are unknown. Originally, the term seems to be a purely dynastic family title. The earliest fully formed reference to a geographical entity known as Andhra *within* the Telugu tradition may well be Śrīnātha's, in the late fourteenth century: here the temple of Dakṣârāma in Konasīma is said to be the center (*karṇikā*) of a lotus that is itself identified as the middle part of the Andhra country (*āndhra-bhū-bhuvana-madhyamu*).[15] This suggests that Andhra extends far beyond the delta, conceived (perhaps metaphorically) as the center of this cultural and geographical universe; deltaic Andhra, for Śrīnātha, is the symbolic heart of the culture. There are, however, other *maṇḍala*-like schemes superimposed on the geographic realities of medieval Andhra. For example, the important temple to Śiva-Mallikârjunasvāmi at Śrīśailam on the Andhra-Karnataka border to the west is said to have four encompassing gateways: Tripurântakam to the east, Siddhavaṭam to the south, Alampūr to the west, and Umā-māheśvaram in Pālamūru (near Accampeṭa) to the north.[16] In this mapping the center has shifted dramatically to the west, to the point of intersection between Tĕlaṅgāṇa and Rāyalasīma. This tendency to reorient and to situate a new center contextually is perfectly

13. On Kākatīya history, see Cynthia Talbot, "Political Intermediaries in Kākatīya Andhra, 1175–1325," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 31.3 (1994), 261–89; idem, "Temples, Donors, and Gifts: Patterns of Patronage in Thirteenth Century South India," *Journal of Asian Studies* 50 (1991), 308–40.

14. Tikkana, *Āndhra-mahābhāratamu* (Hyderabad: Balasarasvati Book Depot, 1984), 4.1.30.

15. Śrīnātha, *Bhīmeśvara-purāṇamu,* ed. Ra. Venkata Subbayya (Madras: Ananda Press, 1901), 3.50.

16. There is also a list of four "corners" or secondary gateways in addition to the above four "directions." These include Eleśvara-kṣetra to the northeast of Śrīśailam (near Nāgârjunakŏṇḍa), Somaśila on the Pĕnnāru to the southeast, Prasūnâcala-kṣetra/Puṣpagiri to the southwest (near Kaḍapa), and Saṅgameśvara to the northwest. Allamrāju Jaggarāvu Śarma, *Śrīśaila sampūrṇa caritra* (Rajahmundry: Laksminarayana Book Depot, 1986), 1; P. V. Parabrahma Sastry, *Śrīśailam, Its History and Cult* (Guntur: Laksmi Mallikarjuna Press, 1985), 2–3, 27–32. The complete Śrīśaila geosystem is yet more complicated, extending to eight *śikhara*-sites, each of which has three *tīrthas.*

characteristic of the medieval Andhra understanding of place. Like so many parts of India, historic Andhra has no clear boundaries. In the early sixteenth century, the conquering emperor Kṛṣṇadevarāya came from Vijayanagara to Śrīkākuḷam, in Kṛṣṇa District, where the god is known as Āndhramahāviṣṇu or Tĕnugu-rāya—perhaps demarcatng yet another center.[17] This same king also went on pilgrimage to Simhâcalam, at the northern edge of Telugu speech, and to Tirupati, at its southern limit,[18] as if consciously tracing the contours of his kingdom.

The frontier inheres in Andhra culture in several powerful ways. If we look first to the northern delta, we strain to see traces of a largely invisible Buddhist proto-Mahāyāna culture flourishing in what is called Konasīma, "the corner" between the two great rivers. We know something of this Buddhist culture from archaeological findings at Nāgârjunakŏṇḍa and Amarāvati, and from the surviving works of the famous philosopher Nāgârjuna, who may have spoken a language that was a precursor to classical Telugu. Five major temple sites in Andhra—Dakṣârāma, Bhīmârāma, Somârāma, Kṣīrārāma, and Amarârāma—were in all likelihood originally Buddhist shrines, as the name *ārāma* suggests. Today all five are entirely Hindu, though Buddhist statuary is scattered throughout the temple courtyards. This process of Brahminizing an early Buddhist substratum, so evident in the five shrines, must have been general and formative. It was successful in the sense that Buddhism disappeared entirely from Andhra. And yet the Buddhist presence seems to have left behind an active and creative level of esotericism in praxis and concept, including Yogic, Tantric, alchemical, and "magical" trends that became a diagnostic feature of medieval Telugu culture.[19] One sees hints of this fascination with esoteric strains of thought in central works of Telugu poetry such as Pĕddana's *Manucaritramu*—the height of the classical tradition—as well as in a range of other textual traditions, such as Gaurana's fifteenth-century summation of the Nātha mythology, *Nava-nātha-caritra,* one of the earliest and richest accounts of the magically oriented Nāths in

17. Kṛṣṇadevarāya, *Āmukta-mālyada,* ed. Vedamu Venkatarayasastri, 2nd ed. (Madras: Vedamy Venkatarayasastri and Brothers, 1964), 1.11; see p. 168. It is highly unusual for a temple to be named after a community in this way; Āndhra-viṣṇu, in the classical purāṇic tradition, is the name of a king, perhaps a memory going back as far as the Sātavāhanas. "Andhra" here may thus be a dynastic title, and as such extended to the region that became known as historical Andhra. A similar perspective probably applies to the Andhras mentioned in early Sanskrit sources such as *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* [Śunaḥśepha]. By the medieval period, a conflation of the dynastic and regional terms was clearly well-established. On Śrīkākuḷam, see the selection from Kāsula Pruṣottamakavi, *Āndhra-nāyaka-śatakamu* (Visakhapatram: Nirmala Publications, 1975) on pp. 248–50 and our forthcoming essay on the temple tradition from this site.

18. Veṅkaṭam at Tirupati is already clearly seen as the northern boundary of the Tamil country in Caṅkam poetry, from the early centuries A.D.

19. See our paper [in press] on the assimilation and transformation of a Buddhist ritual in Śrīnātha's *purāṇa* on Dakṣārāma, the *Bhīmeśvara-purāṇamu.*

any Indian language. And while we find esoteric praxis and ideology in many forms throughout medieval South India,[20] the organic and generative impact of these strands on Telugu religion and literature were perhaps deeper than in any other major south Indian tradition, with the possible exception of Kerala. There was also, almost certainly, an archaic Jaina impact on Telugu culture, of which little is now known; the oldest extant work on metrics, *Kavi-janâśrayamu,* is by a Jaina author, Malliya Recana.[21]

Look now to the harsh Deccan hinterland, a true frontier in many senses. A long process of settlement privileged the resilient warrior, perhaps epitomized by the Deccani god Vīrabhadra—Śiva as hero. We find him at Lepâksi, in Rāyalasīma, at the southern edge of today's Andhra—a black, furious deity.[22] The cultic history of the Deccan must include the expansion of Vīraśaivism, originally a militant movement of antinomian worshipers of Śiva drawn mostly from the so-called "left-hand" castes, that is, those not tied to the land (artisans, merchants, migratory groups, and so on). At Śrīśailam, in the midst of the wilderness, one can observe stages of a long process—still encapsulated in the temple ritual—that seems to have taken this shrine through Buddhist, Vīraśaiva, more normative Śaiva, and finally Brahminized/Sanskritized phases. The exotic "heroic" mode is, in any case, still apparent throughout this region, and we may look here for the first signs of that characteristic individualism—a surprisingly powerful and self-conscious presentation of self as subject—that turns up with consistency in Telugu poetry from at least the time of Śrīnātha onward. We would go so far as to posit this interest in the uniquely individual subject, initially present in unsystematic occurrences in the literature but later exfoliated luxuriantly in Nāyaka-period texts,[23] as a diagnostic feature of the Telugu tradition over many centuries.

To these two prominent thematic drives, each in its own way born of the frontier, that cut through varying strata, periods, and milieux, we may add a third, from the still more deeply internalized boundary zone of language. As the verse quoted at the beginning of this essay suggests, Telugu poets have consistently been drawn to an examination of language in its life-creating, world-generating aspect. Perhaps something of this fascination derives from the experience of living within a linguistic reality that is itself unusually lyrical and fluid, a constant exposure to language itself as musical sound. It is

20. For example, in the Tamil Cittar/Siddhas.

21. The common place-name ending *-pāḍu* may reflect Jaina settlement. Jaina works may well have been destroyed in the course of prolonged conflict with Vīraśaivas (vying for the same "left-hand" constituency), as Pālkuriki Somanātha's *Basava-purāṇamu* suggests.

22. See D. Shulman, "The Masked Goddess in the Mirror," in *Festschrift Günther Sontheimer.*

23. This led directly to the appearance of the first personal diaries in South India, beginning with Ānandaraṅga Piḷḷai in the mid–eighteenth century, writing in Tamil but still within the late-Nāyaka cultural mode.

probably not by chance that Telugu became the predominant vehicle of south Indian classical music. This association of Telugu speakers with music is an old one, clearly attested in Tamil in Cayaṅkŏṇṭār's *Kaliṅkattup-paraṇi* in the early twelfth century.[24] Certainly, the Telugu tradition has pushed the exploration of problems of language (speech, grammar, meter, words) in relation to story, perception, and creativity to a point of unusually powerful feeling and insight.

FIRST POET: NANNAYA

Great literatures classicize their own texts, selecting certain major works or authors over others; they also tend to produce retrospective narratives to make sense of this selection. The result, in the case of Telugu, is a simple developmental scheme that can be found, in one form or another, in all modern histories of this literature, in Telugu or other languages. In this framing of the tradition, all begins with Nannaya, the First Poet (and First Grammarian, since an ordered, premeditated grammar must, in this perspective, precede both normal linguistic reality and the creation of poetry). Earlier poetic works may be presumed to have existed, but they are lost. Nannaya is said to have initiated the age of *purāṇa*-like compositions with his adaptation of the first two and a half books of the *Mahābhārata* epic into Telugu.[25] After some four centuries, this vogue in *purāṇic* poetry gave way to full-fledged *kāvya* or *prabandha* texts—elevated and sustained courtly compositions. The transition to *kāvya* of this type is usually said to have reached its apogee in the Golden Age of Telugu literature at the court of Kṛṣṇadevarāya of Vijayanagara (1509–1529). Following the breakdown of the Vijayanagara state-system in 1565, literature is seen as slowly sinking; with the displacement southward of Telugu political power into the Tamil country under the Nāyaka kings (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries), new forms of poetic production, some of them supposedly "decadent," became prominent in the afterglow of the classical efflorescence. Modern poetry then represents a blinding flash of revolutionary brilliance against the smoldering backdrop of the Nāyaka and post-Nāyaka decline.

Such is the standard format, a still regnant mythology of poetic evolution, useful, perhaps, for rudimentary classification of the poets. It bears almost no relation to the deeper currents of this amazingly rich and in-

24. Cayaṅkŏṇṭār, *Kaliṅkattup-paraṇi* (Madras: South India Saiva Siddhanta Works, 1975), 470: some of the survivors of the defeated Kaliṅga army disguise themselves as musicans (*pāṇar*) from the Telugu country as they flee the conquering Chola force.

25. The term *purāṇa* in Telugu, unlike the Sanskrit usage, usually applies to *campū* compositions of mixed prose and verse with a strong narrative intent.

tricate tradition. It seems likely that this schematic vision is itself derived from a seventeenth-century retrospective ordering of previous works in a manner that first produced the idealized image of a Golden Age centered around Kṛṣṇadevarāya with his eight great poets, the *aṣṭa-dig-gajas,* homologized to the eight elephants who hold up the cardinal points of space. (In this sense, literary history and traditional history have marched in tandem; seventeenth-century texts first seem to have imagined Kṛṣṇadevarāya in the mode of synoptic "great king.") Indeed, one could argue that it was this later moment of integration, self-reflection, synthesis in grammar and linguistic metaphysics, and retrospective narrativization, in the mid-seventeenth-century Deccan, that marks the true peak of originality in the mature medieval tradition, if such a temporal definition has any meaning.

We can attempt to substitute for the standard evolutionary scheme a more subtle template that will take account of the profound shifts in style and expressivity as well as changes in major cultural themes and premises. Certain key, perhaps emblematic, figures help us to orient this picture of the tradition: Nannaya, Tikkana, Śrīnātha, Pĕddana, and Kṛṣṇadevarāya, in the early stages. Each of these poets, by virtue of creative innovation, changed the rules of play and transformed the classical tradition. Here again we must begin with Nannaya, not as grammarian[26] but as the poet who first produced a Telugu style commensurate with a complex, and entirely Telugu, sensibility. Clearly, he knew that he was doing this—knew that he was innovative in creating a musical and flowing poetic form, dense with expressive possibilities and unique to his mother tongue. Listen to the way he describes himself (in the third person):

> *sāramatin kavîndrulu prasanna-kathā-kalitârtha-yukti-lon*
> *ārasi melu nān itarul′akṣara-ramyatan ādarimpa nā-*
> *nā-rucirârtha-sūkti-nidhi nannaya bhaṭṭu tĕnungunan mahā-*
> *bhārata-saṃhitā-racana-bandhuruḍ′ayyĕ jagad-dhitambugan*
>
> Nannaya then became absorbed in composing in Tenungu
> the whole *Mahābhārata* collection. His carefully uttered words
> glow with multiple meanings: poets with penetrating minds
> follow the lively narrative through to its inner purpose,
> while others give themselves to the harmony of the sounds.[27]

Let us restate this achievement in somewhat different terms: what Nannaya invented was a style of poetic narrative in which the story line is clear, pleasing, and uninterrupted, but that at the same time allows the hearer/reader

26. On the cultural importance of the image of the first grammarian, see p. 49.
27. Nannaya, 1.1.25.

to reflect on it and to appreciate the subtleties of meaning. Moreover, the texture—which includes such components as lexical choices, the play of meter, and, above all, the way Sanskrit and Telugu are combined—is harmonious, economical, and musical. Nannaya himself suggests the following two hallmarks of his poetry: *prasanna-kathā-kalitârtha-yukti,* "lively narrative . . . with its inner purpose"—a feature perceptible only to "poets with penetrating minds"—and *akṣara-ramyata,* "the harmony of sounds," the phonoaesthetic interplay of syllables. All of this requires a particular and characteristic blending of Sanskrit and Dravidian words and a creative use of Sanskrit compounds, in a manner unknown in "pure" Sanskrit but, after Nannaya, paradigmatic for Telugu. The long Sanskrit compounds that appear throughout Nannaya's poetry, in meters often adapted, again creatively, from Sanskrit into Telugu, are organized semantically rather than metrically. They tend to be longer than is common in earlier Sanskrit poems, and they often spill over line endings, since Telugu meter, unlike Sanskrit, allows complex enjambment. Put differently, the Telugu patterns established by Nannaya's work are not limited by meter: one reads a Telugu verse by breaking at syntactic-semantic pauses. As a result, the stanza allows for more complex syntactic structures and tremendous variation in cadence. The metrical skeleton hardly ever shows through the poem. What one hears, or notices, is the play of muscle and flesh that constitutes texture. By contrast, a verse that mechanically reveals its metrical organization, its caesura breaks and line endings, is considered either as a failure or as belonging to another level of the tradition, perhaps purely oral. It is this kind of sophisticated texturing, with its complex flow of subtle words and sentences, that Nannaya pioneered, and it is this that helps to explain the miracle of transmutation so characteristic of Telugu literature from that time onward, whereby whole pieces of Sanskrit phraseology can be lifted from a Sanskrit source and reworked into a borrowed Sanskrit meter, and yet be entirely and amazingly Telugu.

This same process applies to the transformation of genre. Nannaya's *Mahābhārata* both is and is not a *purāṇa.* It follows the inherited story line, usually with remarkable fidelity to the prototype. But it also allows, indeed demands, reflection upon this narrative and an aesthetic savoring of the texture of its telling on the part of the reader, a process mostly unknown to Sanskrit *purāṇas.*[28] Something quite new happened, and it became the starting point of a process that continued for a thousand years of Telugu literary production. Technically, too, there is the pattern of interspersing verse, in varying meters, and rhythmic prose (the *campū* style that became norma-

28. It appears that a similar or parallel process was also taking place in Kannada poetry roughly during this same period (in Pampa, for example).

tive). At the same time, there is a unique quality that is wholly Nannaya's and could never even be imitated by his successors: a gentleness in tone and a freshness in depiction of characters who are domesticated, but only to a certain point. His Sanskrit kings remain dignified and slightly remote, though they are also brought closer to the familiar range of experience of an Andhra listener. The vehemence and wildness of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* are softened and partly tamed, even as the inner world of the characters becomes more familiar. In this sense, as in the stylistic domain discussed earlier, the existence of the Sanskrit prototype becomes a relatively abstract presence that hardly impinges upon the dynamic world of the Telugu text. Only the modern misapplication of the notion of "translation" to Telugu literary creation could see Nannaya—and a host of other Telugu poets—as primarily "translators."

Nannaya's adapation of the *campū* style also implies a particularly active, participatory role for the listener. The *itihāsa* epic frame normally requires the presence of a speaker and a listener; for example, Sañjaya speaks to Dhṛtarāṣṭra *within* the story, describing the battle to his blind master, but his words are reported by the Sūta-narrator to the "original" listener, Śaunaka, and other sages. The Sūta, however, is merely repeating what Vaiśampāyana recited, on the basis of his teacher Vyāsa's composition, to King Janamejaya at the time of the latter's sacrifice of snakes. These concentric frames are reframed by Nannaya, who sings the same story to his patron, Rājarājanarendra. And we, listening to a *paurāṇika* reciter, find ourselves in precisely the same dialogic situation. The innovation lies in the assimilation of this format to what is, in effect, a *kāvya:* an aesthetic, self-conscious literary work. Sanskrit literary *kāvya,* for whatever reason, does not share this need to internalize the listener. Part of the great power of Nannaya's *campū* lies precisely in this activation and co-option of the listener—a characteristic feature of the oral storytelling mode—within a reinvented literary genre.

In general, Nannaya's manner of narration skillfully combines an economy of words with a perfect choice of phrases that embody the emotional progression in events.[29] The story often unfolds with great rapidity that unexpectedly allows room for reflection on the depth of feeling: this is the "lively narrative with inner purpose" of which the poet himself speaks. Sometimes a single verse encompasses a carefully articulated transition in state or a progression in emotion. For example, King Yayāti, riding through the forest, hears a young woman—Devayāni—calling for help from the dry well into which she has been pushed by her rival. The king dutifully extends his hand to help her out:

29. Perhaps the first to articulate this feature of Nannaya's poetry analytically and persuasively was Visvanatha Satyanarayana in his *Nannayagāri prasanna-kathā-kalitârtha-yukti,* 4th ed. (Vijayavada: Visvanatha Satyanarayana, 1970).

jaladhi-vilola-vīci-vilasat-kala-kāñci-samañcitâvanī-
tala-vahana-kṣamamb′aina dakṣiṇa-hastamunan ṭad-unnamad-
gaḷad-uru-gharma-vāri-kaṇa-kamra-karâbjamu vaṭṭi nūti-lo
vĕluvaḍa komalin diviceˇ viśruta-kīrti yayāti prītiton (3.1.141)

With his right hand, that was equal
to the weight of the whole world
circled by shimmering waves of many oceans,
he grasped hers, held out to him,
as befits a proper king. Drops of sweat
were trickling down her delicate skin,
as he helped her from the well,
with love.

First, there is the hand itself—strong enough to bear the earth with its surrounding oceans, all part of a single strong compound. On the other end, another hand, raised, ready to be grasped, wet with the delicate drops of her perspiration that make it even more beautiful, *kamra.* Everything lies in the readiness that reflects an intention: Devayāni wants to marry this king. But Yayāti as yet knows nothing of this, and feels nothing; he pulls her out, *divicĕ,* with a neutral, simple verb, utterly without feeling. Why does he do this? Because he is *vísruta-kīrti,* a man of good name; he is doing his duty—all part of a day's work. And then, suddenly, unexpectedly, in the very last word of the verse, there *is* feeling: *prītiton,* "with love." Before he realizes it himself, he is lost, taken with her beauty, and not only the beauty of her outstretched arm, which he has held and pulled, but also that of her whole body, since Devayāni was pushed naked into the well. We are not, however, told this explicitly; it is implicit in the earlier part of the story, which the listener certainly knows. A lesser narrator might have elaborated the point, but Nannaya is content to suggest it, or to remind his audience of it, with a single word that closes the verse by revealing the shift in the king's perception. It is one thing to show an object, another to reveal this object through the feelings of a participant or onlooker within the story.

There is yet another aspect to Nannaya's originality, at the very limit of linguistic expression. Perhaps more than any later Telugu poet, with the possible exception of Śrīnātha in his *Bhīmeśvara-purāṇamu,* Nannaya produces a "magical" or "mantric" effect. At certain points—for example, in the hymn to the snakes in the Udaṅka section translated below—he exceeds the bounds of poetry, or of reference.

bahu-vana-pādapâbdhi-kula-parvata-pūrṇa-saras-sarij-jharī-
sahita-mahā-mahī-bharam′ajasra sahasra-phaṇâḷi dālci dus-
sahatara-mūrtikin jaladhi-śāyiki p̄āyaka śayyayainan ay-
yahi-pati duṣkṛtântakuḍ′anantuḍu māku prasannuḍ′ayyĕdun

Sustaining always on his thousand hoods
the dense burden of the earth,
the forests and oceans and rooted mountains
and rushing rivers and lakes, the Snake
called Infinite softly bears the unbearable body
of the god who sleeps on water.
Won't he make an end to whatever
was badly done, and be kind to me?

One long Sanskrit compound gives us the whole massiveness and heaviness of earth, indicated both by the long string of elements (forests, oceans, mountains, rivers, and lakes) and by the repeated *ha* sounds—also built into the rhyme scheme in the second syllable of each line—as if to demonstrate the breathlessness of the great snake who bears this burden on his thousand heads. But this dense alliteration has only begun: it is resumed by a dangling, unusual adverb: *ajasra,* "always," another Sanskrit loan that would normally require a Telugu case-ending but which here simply flows into the line, rhyming with the following word, *sahasra* ("thousand"). The dangling adverb, in the rush of alliterating sound, suggests the uninterrupted process of bearing the earth's burden. Now, at last, there is a small piece of Dravidian, the nonfinite verb *dālci,* "bearing." The work is thus still incomplete; another burden must still be borne. The snake Ādiśeṣa, along with bearing the earth, is also the bed on which the god Viṣṇu sleeps in the ocean of milk, and the poet makes sure that we feel this additional, indeed infinite, weight of the god by another gush of sibilants and aspirates, spilling over the line-break: *duS-SaHatara-mūrtikin jalaDHi-Śāyiki pāyaka Śayyayaina ay-yaHi-pati.* . . . These two burdens, incidentally, are never seen together in iconography or joined in story; Nannaya has fused them, doubling the snake's dreadful task and arousing our admiration for him. The listener, by now bent double himself under this weight, miraculously made present through the language, needs to rest. For the god, at least, a soft bed is available: the repeated cushioning of the soft double semivowels, *-yy(a)-*, a delicately iconic reproduction of the texture of the snake's body. And this entire description is part of an appeal to the snakes on the part of the young Udaṅka who, as is customary, preludes his request with flattery or praise. This verbal production of overpowering sounds has the effect of making palpable and present the snake's own experience; what is more, the verse also controls the reality it has created, like a snake-charming *mantra.* Indeed, Nannaya's verses in this passage are believed to serve this very purpose of providing protection from snakes.

Here, as one sometimes finds in Nannaya, it is the sound that matters most, more even than any translatable meaning. The sounds, even beneath the words, create a world of their own. Perhaps all language oscillates between the poles of denotative reference and existential creativity; Nannaya

is often closer to the latter pole. He tells us, not boastfully, that he always speaks truth (*nitya-satya-vacanun,* 1.9 below), suggesting a self-discipline that fashioned a purity of tongue. This "true" relation to language enables him, in effect, to transcend language.

TIKKANA: BOUNDARIES OF THE ORAL

Nannaya belongs to the Delta, and the north, and to a transient moment in the history of the Eastern Chāḷukya state. He was also, like the great majority of Telugu poets throughout the centuries, a Brahmin. Literary historians have tended to class him as a court poet and his poetry as an elitist, courtly production. These terms may, however, be inadequate descriptions of the poet's reality. One hesitates to ascribe or to attempt to explain anything of Nannaya's power and stature by reference to the weak, short-lived political system within which he found a place. As was so often the case in Telugu literary history, this poet dwarfed by far his supposed patron. Indeed, in a deeper sense, the poet may be said to have created his patron and to have invested him with fame. Moreover, it is the poet who supplied the ideological or conceptual frame within which the state functioned. This is, in fact, one of the historic roles of major Telugu poets.

Nannaya's immediate successor, Tikkana, came from much farther south, in Nĕllūru, and from a smaller political system, that of Manumasiddhi, loosely connected to the powerful Kākatīya state (thirteenth century). Tikkana was minister to this king, and later traditions credited him with active roles in politics and war.[30] The localization of *Mahābhārata* themes and contents in an Andhra cultural frame achieved a new impetus in Tikkana's poetry. And if Nannaya invented Telugu poetry, as the tradition correctly insists, it is Tikkana who imagined this tradition into self-conscious existence, making Nannaya, retrospectively, the first poet. "First" implies that others follow, and Tikkana is first among these, even in his own eyes. But the Telugu world that he imagined also has expanded to include new domains: *dharmaśāstra* texts, foundational texts of grammar, and the story (*kathā*) tradition, seen as *kāvya,* for example. Tikkana's disciple Ketana was responsible for early works in these genres. Under his master's sponsorship, Ketana produced the *Vijñāneśvarīyamu,* a legal commentary, as well as the Telugu *Daśa-kumāra-caritramu,* after Daṇḍin, and the *Āndhra-bhāṣā-bhūṣaṇamu,* probably the earliest Telugu grammar.[31] Law, grammar, poetry, and "history"

30. See the stories about him recorded in *Siddheśvara-caritramu* of Kāsĕ Sarvappa (sixteenth century).

31. The *sūtras* ascribed to Nannaya under the name *Āndhra-śabda-cintāmaṇi* are in all likelihood of a later period, perhaps crystallizing only in the seventeenth century together with the myth of the origins of grammar.

(*itihāsa*)—all these exist in Tikkana's semantic universe. It was, in a way, a distinct universe, entirely conceived and fleshed out in Telugu by this poet, aptly known as *kavi-brahma,* the Poet-Creator.

In stylistic terms, Tikkana's own large corpus—fifteen *parvans* of the epic—stands alone; no later poet was able to follow his example. Syntactically, his poetry embodies idiomatic, almost colloquial, Dravidian patterns. At the same time, long Sanskrit compounds serve him whenever there is an architectural need for elevated emphasis:

> *durvārodyama-bāhu-vikrama-rasâstoka-pratāpa-sphurad-*
> *garvândha-prativīra-nirmathana-vidyā-pāragul mat-patul. . . .*
>
> [Draupadi to her tormentor Kīcaka:]
> Invincible, valiant, virile,
> exquisitely equipped to destroy
> any enemy blinded by pride
> are my husbands, all five of them . . .

Translation fails to reproduce the effect of what is a single compound entirely in somewhat arcane Sanskrit—a kind of drawn-out explosion of language intensified by the resort to a borrowed register, where the Sanskrit phonemes, with their conjunct consonants, aspirates, and harsh plosives, carry the expressive urgency. Draupadi is threatening Kīcaka, and the threat comes across precisely because of this borrowed but internalized phonotactic feature. Dravidian clusters tend to be softer, voiced, and much shorter; Sanskrit allows a buildup of dense linguistic pressure. But the real expressivity of a verse like this depends on the combination of these two levels: the relentlessly intensifying, semantically compacted Sanskrit compound striving breathlessly toward a pause, and the framing and containing Dravidian syntax, which tends to break into discrete, short units:

> *gīrvāṇâkṛtul′evur′ipḍu ninu dorlīlan vĕsan giṭṭi gan-*
> *dharvul mānamun prāṇamun konuṭa tathyamb′ĕmmĕyin kīcakā*
>
> *gandharvas* with the bodies of gods.
> Listen, Kīcaka: they will easily
> ruin your name and kill you.
> Depend on that.

The verse that began with a single long compound that perfectly represents the fearsome internal qualities of the heroes devolves in its second half into a string of singular, largely indexical, staccato movements: "the five of them—right now—you—easily—getting angry—will get you—your honor—your life—no doubt—somehow or other." There is no place inside this verse for Kīcaka to hide: the *gandharva* husbands will hunt him to the ends of the earth, as if they had marked him with their pointing finger,

represented by the finger of the speaker, Draupadi, almost visibly waving at Kīcaka as she utters this warning. Restated in terms of breathing—a central factor in any recitation of the verse, no less so than in the case of, let us say, a flutist—the first two lines require a single long breath, held almost beyond endurance, setting up a tension within the mind of the listener. After the compound ends and the reciter can breathe again, the poet forces him into a series of hammerlike short bursts of language, none of them allowing him to stop for a full breath until the long vowel at the end, in the vocative *kīca-kaaa*—the moment of exhaustion. It is as if Draupadi had started out, fully in control, with a violent phonetic attack upon her enemy that finally renders *him* breathless, knocked out by the punctuating series of indexical blows.

Effects such as these are standard in Tikkana. The listener maintains a necessary syntactic presence, within the verse, more than an imagined narrative presence. In this respect Tikkana remains close to an oral, conversational mode, as if speaking to a listener in front of him. His text speaks rather than sings—he is thus less lyrical and more expressive than Nannaya—and the audible dimension is never lost. These are not verses written on palm leaves, printed on pages, read silently in libraries. They exist in the living space between the poet and his listener, who hears and feels every syllable in the body.

By the same token, Tikkana begins a narrative style in which the speaker within the text is entirely identified with the character. It is Draupadi who speaks the above verse, not the poet. She speaks in accordance with well-defined, individualized, subjective patterns that are wholly hers, and no one else's. This is not to say that the poet is absent; his style still overrides, or colors, the speech of his characters. However, within the frame of Tikkana's poetic language, one can hear distinct voices. This individualized "voicing" marks a quantum leap in Telugu poetry (sometimes described, rather lamely, by modern critics as Tikkana's *naṭakīyata,* "dramatic quality"). Strikingly, however, this feature seems to stop with Tikkana. For the same reason, Tikkana's verse does not flow with the same ease as Nannaya's, or as purely oral poetry, which must have been dominant in his time. It is not easy to read a Tikkana verse; the syntactical breaks tend to be unpredictable—as in living speech—retarding the movement of the meter, stopping and starting afresh, laden with indexicality. This is poetry at the very edge of everyday language, with all its freshness, individuality, and continual surprise.

Listen, for example, to Sudeṣṇa, Draupadi's mistress, as she urges Draupadi, against her will, to go to Kīcaka's house to fetch some liquor:

akkaṭay enu veḍkapaḍiy ānĕḍun āsavam′ arthin teragān
ŏkka nikṛṣtan pañcuṭakun opaka cĕppina dīnin īvu go-
s′ĕkkaga c̲esi ninnun atihīna-vidhāna-niyukta c̲etagā
nikkamay ummaliñcit′idi nĕyyamu tiyyamu kalmiye sakhī

But I wanted it so badly—my very favorite drink.
I didn't want to send some lowly servant.
But you are making a big issue of it, as if
I had asked something improper. You're all in agony.
Is this how a friend helps a friend?

Sudeṣṇa starts, breaks, starts again, breaks off, resumes; literally, the verse looks something like this: "I wanted it. Badly. My favorite drink. Didn't want to send a lowly servant. Asked you. You're making a fuss. As if it's something improper. You're upset. Really. Is this good friendship, my friend?" One long sentence, built around a series of nonfinites, infinitives, and conditionals that break it into a choppy sequence of part-utterances. The sequence culminates in a final appeal, a rhetorical question, which nicely masks the speaker's true intention. Not by chance, perhaps, the fourth line begins, at the point of greatest poetic tension, with the adverb *nikkama:* "truly." This is followed by the one finite verb, *ummaliñciti(vi),* "you're upset," an example of the kind of Dravidian root that is common in Tikkana but that later gradually fell into disuse. The feeling of the verse as a whole is one of actual conversation, with a hidden subtext, in a natural syntax that continually frustrates the flow of the *utpala-māla* meter.

Perhaps it is this recurring frustration in the internal movement of the verse that produced a revolutionary problem and that encapsulates the tension between Tikkana's innovative power and the ingrained habits of recitation. Someone trained to recite, for example, *utpala-māla* verses in the oral style comes up against tremendous obstacles when he comes to Tikkana. Oral versification requires *dhāra*—the unimpeded flow of words—and *dhoraṇi,* the "mode" in which the flow takes place. Shifting to another meter brings the expectation of another mode, but a similar flow. But in Tikkana neither happens. The reciter begins, stops, tries again, is again checked—very much like in ordinary speech, but utterly unlike the normal sung stanza. The combination of speech and meter, which is required if the poem is to speak, explains this difficulty, apparently keenly felt by the singers. It may also explain Tikkana's isolation within the tradition; his style was never taken up or imitated by later poets.

Indeed, the tradition itself recognized and commented upon this feature. Tikkana is said to have made a pact with his scribe, Gurunātha, from the potters' caste, to the effect that Gurunātha would record, without pausing, the poems Tikkana was improvising on condition that the poet never stop the flow of verse. If Gurunātha were to fail to keep his side of the pact, he would cut off his right hand; if Tikkana failed, he would cut off his tongue. The arrangement worked well until, at a point in the text where the internal narrator Sañjaya was describing the epic battle to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Tikkana became stuck in the middle of a verse, unable to complete it. In despair, he

cried out to his scribe: "*emi sĕppudun gurunāthā*" ("what can I say, Gurunātha?"). The scribe kept writing without pause, as usual, and the poem worked, since the poet's cry completed the verse, precisely according to the meter and meaning. The nasal ending of the verb, *sĕppudun,* requires that *kurunātha*—"lord of the Kurus," that is, Dhṛtarāṣṭra—become *gurunātha* in *written* Telugu. Tikkana was reaching for his sword to cut off his tongue when the scribe explained to him that all was well with the verse, because of this simple rule.

This story, disarmingly simple in appearance, actually offers powerful expression to the peculiar boundary zone that Tikkana inhabits in Telugu poetry. It seeks, on the one hand, to rehabilitate him, turning him back into an oral poet, since at this period, real poetry is still perceived as inhering in the oral, flowing qualities of a verse. Oral poetics remained dominant, and "literariness"—with its concomitant freedom—was still not poetically acceptable. A literary poem, in this sense, had to conform to the dominant poetics. On the other hand, the story implies a recognition of the innovation that Tikkana had introduced into the tradition. The ambivalence is striking: the story attempts to mitigate the full force of this innovation by assimilating the poet to the older model. Tikkana, in the story, unconsciously fulfills this role, though his completion of the verse is really a cry of despair, at the moment before he will strike himself speechless, cutting off his own tongue. It is as if more deeply, unconsciously, the poet remains a singer. Gurunātha's origin from the potters reinforces this claim, since the potters, a "left-hand" caste, are closely linked to the singing of texts. The story also shows us the new value attached to writing down a text, fixing it graphically without relinquishing the still-valued singing mode (which depends on audible utterance). In fact, the verse "works" only when sung: in writing, *kurunātha* becomes *gurunātha,* the cry of despair to the scribe; in recitation, this remains *kurunātha,* an address to the Kuru lord. One can see, in this vignette, the whole burden of the transition that Tikkana articulates for this tradition.

This transition has further features related to the wider literary world of Tikkana's time. Tikkana refers to himself in the colophons to his work as *ubhaya-kavi-mitra,* "a friend to both [kinds of] poets." This somewhat enigmatic phrase has several possible meanings, and implies tension between two schools of poets. It could be a question of Sanskrit in relation to Telugu; or of Śaivas in relation to non-Śaivas; or Brahmins versus non-Brahmins (this categorization, however, is probably a back-formation that we tend to read into the early medieval period); or of oral/folk poetics in relation to the written and scholarly/literary genres, newly emerging from Nannaya's time. We have seen the originality that Tikkana brought to the reconfiguration of Sanskrit and Telugu, and we have noted the particular prominence Dravidian syntactic, especially idiomatic, patterns have for him. But there is a sense in which Tikkana clearly faced a coherent, contemporaneous counter-

tradition—that of the Vīraśaiva poets, such as Pālkuriki Somanātha, who made the non-Sanskritic *dvipada* meter their main expressive vehicle. In Somanātha's words, the opposition between Sanskrit and Telugu, or between the "high" *campū* style and the purely Telugu-based *dvipada,* is starkly articulated. Somanātha, in line with the iconoclastic and anti-Brahmin thrust of Vīraśaiva religion generally, pits himself consciously against Nannaya's literary style and the tradition that emerged from it:

> Since beautiful, idiomatic Telugu is more commonly understood than heavy compositions of mixed prose and verse, I have chosen to compose this [work] entirely in the *dvipada* meter. Let it not be said that these words are nothing but Telugu. Rather look at them as equal to the Vedas. If you wonder how that can be, remember, "If a *tūmu* is a [large] standard for measure, so is a *sŏla.*" Is it not generally agreed that the stature of a poet derives from his ability to compose great poetry in simple language?"[32]

Dvipada, in the hands of Somanātha, offered tremendous promise, given its enormous range of syntactic variation and the hypnotic power of the chanted string of couplets. Lesser poets, however, were unable to equal Somanātha's virtuoso handling of the restricted couplet form (and even Somanātha himself, in his *Paṇḍitârādhya caritra,* fails to maintain the emotional subtleties and syntactic fascination evident in his *Basava-purāṇa*). But *dvipada* tends, in any case, to limit the active role of the listener (and we insist again that at this period poetry was always read aloud to a group of listeners). *Campū,* with its mixture of verse and prose and its dependence upon the elaboration of the single stanza, always allows space for breaks in recitation, for commentary and reflection. In this sense, *campū,* as a final product in performance, always has two authors: the poet who produced the text and the reciter who sings it, explicates it, and opens it up to new experience. In effect, the reciter re-creates the text continually. *Dvipada,* despite its powerful narrative capabilities, tends to monotones and lulls the listener into passivity. This is a structural feature of the genre, incapable of resolution even by a brilliant poet; it helps to explain the eventual marginalization of the *dvipada* mode, as opposed to the almost infinite exfoliation of the *campū* style.

Nonetheless, *dvipada* maintained a presence in the ongoing evolution of the tradition, at least through the seventeenth century.[33] In the fourteenth century, Gona Buddhārĕḍḍi composed a *dvipada Rāmāyaṇa* (the so-called

32. Pālkuriki Somanātha, *Basava-purāṇamu,* ed. Nidudavolu Venkata Ravu (Madras: Andhra Granthamala, 1952) 1 (p. 4); see discussion in V. Narayana Rao, *Śiva's Warriors: The Basava Purāṇa of Pālkuriki Somanātha* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 5–6.

33. In the courts of the Nāyaka kings, *dvipada* received, for the first time, consistent royal attention and patronage (like other popular forms); Raghunāthanāyaka himself composed *dvipada* texts.

Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇa), moving the style into a Vaiṣṇava realm. Tension remained between this style and the more courtly forms of *campū* and, later, *kāvya,* a tension which reflects structural fault lines within the Telugu literary world. At the same time, the *campū* style, at least in the hands of Tikkana, clearly absorbed creative elements and linguistic features from the countertradition, especially from Somanātha. In this sense, Tikkana's innovation includes the mediation between these two worlds of Telugu poetry, as his self-given epithet, *ubhaya-kavi-mitra,* indicates.

Tikkana faced this cultural challenge directly, attempting a synthesis of the conflicting pulls. Populist and elitist strands—or, if one prefers, regional and pan-Indian/Sanskritic—come together in his poetry, which stylistically and thematically forged a new sensibility. The same move toward synthesis is apparent in his choice of deity, Hari-Hara, a composite form of Viṣṇu and Śiva whom he addresses in his invocations.

It is also important to realize the more generalized direction of aesthetic transformation that Tikkana brought to his reworking of the *Mahābhārata* text. The stylistic and syntactical features we have outlined are perfectly in line with this wider shift, which turns the Sanskrit epic into a Telugu family drama of local south Indian chiefs. Emotions are "Teluguized," situated in wholly familiar frames and integrated with a Telugu psychology. When the young hero Abhimanyu is cruelly killed in battle, the response that Tikkana produces from his audience—through the voices of Dhṛtrarāṣṭra or Yudhiṣṭhira and others—is something like, "How could you do this to my grandson (or nephew)?" Here is Dhṛtarāṣṭra after he hears of Abhimanyu's death:

> *cittamu vŏkkĕḍum ṗuruṣa-simhuni ṗautra-kulāgragaṇyun a-*
> *tyuttama-teju bhūri-guṇun oppĕḍu mĕttani menivānin ĕṭ-*
> *l′uttala pĕṭṭiro paluvur′ugra-manaskulu gūḍiy akkaṭāy*
> *attĕrag′ĕlla teṭa-paḍunaṭṭulugā vivariñci cĕppumā*[34]
>
> My mind blisters in pain.
> How could they torture my favorite grandson?
> He was courageous, brilliant, but still a tender young boy.
> Cruel-hearted men, many of them, came together
> to do this thing. Tell me how it happened
> and what led up to it, help me understand.

And here is Yudhiṣṭhira, Abhimanyu's uncle:

> *kŏḍuku ṗoḍagānak′arjunuḍ′aḍigĕneni*
> *vāniton iṅkan em′anuvāḍa harikin*
> *atani gārābu celiyalik′adhika-duḥkha-*
> *m′ena cesiti vagavaṇgan emi galadu*

34. Tikkana, 7.2.3 (Droṇaparva).

bāluḍu sukumāruḍu pĕk-
k′ālamulan c̱ŏcciy ĕrugaḍ′anaka mŏna sŏram
jāludu corum′ani panicitin
elā nann′āsa dosam′ĕrugagan iccun

kuḍuvanu ḵaṭṭanu p̱ūyanu
toḍuvanu p̱o banici kāka tŏluta mŏna sŏram
ḵŏḍukum p̱anucuṭak′ĕvvaḍu
gaḍagunĕ nāyaṭṭi pāpa-karmuḍu dakkan[35]

When Arjuna can't find his son and asks me,
what can I say? I am the one
who caused immense grief
to Kṛṣṇa and his dear sister.
What use is remorse?

I didn't say to myself, "He's still a boy,
delicate, with no experience of battle."
Instead, I told him: "You can do it.
Go and fight." I'm the one who sent him.
It was greed that blinded me to my faults.

I didn't send him to eat, to get dressed,
to put on ornaments. I sent him straightaway
into battle. Who would do such a thing
except someone as bad as me?

If we compare Tikkana's articulation of this moment with that of the Sanskrit original, we immediately notice a striking difference in tone, despite the very close verbal correspondence between the two texts. In Sanskrit, Yudhiṣṭḥira says:

What can I say to Arjuna, or to Subhadrā?. . .
I have wronged Subhadrā, Kṛṣṇa, and Arjuna,
in my self-absorption and my lust for victory.

A greedy person has no understanding of his faults.
He acts out of confusion and hunger.
I wanted the honey, and I failed to foresee
this fall.

We should have offered him food,
or money, or fine clothes and ornaments.
Instead, we offered up this boy
in battle.[36]

35. Ibid., 7.2.140–42.

36. *Yo 'sau bhojye puras-kāryo dhaneṣu vasaneṣu ca / bhūṣaṇeṣu ca so 'smābhir bālo yudhi puras-kṛtaḥ.*

How could he be safe, young and inexperienced
as he was, like a good horse on an uneven slope?[37]

Or maybe we, too, will soon die,
burned by Arjuna's furious eyes.

Victory no longer gives me pleasure,
or ruling a kingdom, or being immortal,
living in the same world with the gods,
now that I have seen this magnificent boy,
full of courage, cut down.[38]

Yudhiṣṭḥira, whether speaking Sanskrit or Telugu, has definite tendencies toward self-reproach, guilt, doubt, and disgust with his public persona and role. This is a given. But listen to how differently he tells us this in the two languages. In Telugu, the first-person pronoun and first-person verbal forms dominate the utterance: "*I* should have known; *I* am the one who sent him; *I* could have done otherwise; *I* was greedy; what can *I* say"—and, finally, "I am bad." Everything is personal, immediate, and fully internalized, and grief speaks directly along with guilt. Moreover, Yudhiṣṭḥira takes responsibility here for the rest of the family. It is a family tragedy, focused on a Deccan patriarch-hero, that is being displayed, *before* it becomes the story of a warrior's death. The quality of emotion is closer to home. In some sense, these emotions are also embedded in the Sanskrit prototype, and to that extent we can say that Tikkana is extremely faithful to the original. But the Sanskrit Yudhiṣṭḥira wavers, loses focus, and slips into abstract gnomic statements: "A greedy person has no understanding of his faults" (in contrast to Tikkana's "It was greed that blinded me to *my* faults"). Before this thought is complete, he is already elsewhere, anticipating Arjuna's furious revenge (and, as the Sanskrit text continues, the pragmatic usefulness of Arjuna's rage in the ongoing war). We lose, as he himself does, the full integrity of his grief, and are left with his confusion. Then, concluding the lament, comes Yudhiṣṭḥira's usual inner move (missing from Tikkana's passage): he is sick of it all, indifferent to victory, and reluctant to rule; none of it has meaning for him any more. In short, he wants to renounce the world. The personal tragedy is already, all-too-easily, precipitated into an almost generalized cultural predicament.

What this implies, among other things, is that Tikkana's characters achieve a deliberately intended coherence in speech, in the way their actions and movements are described, and in their entire presence within the Telugu text. This is a function of a well-constructed written text, and is dis-

37. *Sad-aśva iva sambādhe viṣame.*

38. *Mahābhārata* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1933–59), 7.48.12–13, 15–19, 26. [Sanskrit.]

tinct from the reader's usual experience of the major figures in the Sanskrit epic. Their shifting focus is a natural result of their position within an originally oral text, which we have in its recorded redaction. To state this point a little differently: the full dimensions of the characters within the Sanskrit epic depend partly upon the text as we have it, and partly upon the oral milieu outside it that supplemented the verses. That oral dimension is now lost when we come to the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata,* and the written text is venerated. In contrast, Tikkana offers a fully articulated, nuanced world, in which there is room for the characters to be, or to become, fully themselves. They can also cumulate internal experience and grow.

For a Telugu audience, there is something irreversible in Tikkana's reworking of the epic. While Tikkana adheres closely to the verbal text of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata,* he has in effect re-created the text in a Telugu mode, alive with Telugu-speaking heroes. Once one has seen the *Mahābhārata* through Tikkana's lens, which emphasizes and selects elements of the original, it is almost impossible *not* to experience these elements even in Sanskrit—as when a hitherto unnoticed pattern is pointed out in a design and then can no longer be ignored. A good "translation," in this perspective, creates a new original. This is not a matter of adapting, imitating, or following. The new original preexists in the "old" original, before the translation, but it needs the translator to reveal it. (Put backward, this means that the original anticipates its own translations—perhaps an inexhaustible series—and depends on these translations for its own total expression.) This also explains why "translation," understood in this manner, can be the beginning of an entirely new literary culture.

To sum up to this point: Tikkana reveals an activist, imaginative drive toward fashioning the universe of Telugu literature and culture. This universe expanded under his tutelage to incorporate new levels and genres, including not only *dharmaśāstra,* grammar, *kāvya,* and *itihāsa,* but also the restless, antinomian Śaiva world couched in a highly regional idiom. This incorporation of wider elements actually meant the co-option of more specific modes into what now became the mainstream of Telugu poetry, directly evolving out of Nannaya's original template. From this point onward, the distinctive, volatile, and creative fusion of elements inherent in the literary *campū* institutionalized itself as the expressive arena for most Telugu poets. At the same time, Tikkana's expansion of this mode, along the lines we have discussed, prepared the ground for the extraordinary developments of the fourteenth century.

POEMS AND ARROWS: NANNĔCOḌA

Before we turn to these developments, we may pause to consider the enigmatic figure of Nannĕcoḍa, of undetermined date, but perhaps belonging

to the interval between Nannaya and Tikkana. Nanněcoḍa, unlike most Telugu poets, was a non-Brahmin—a king of the Telugu Coḍas ruling in Orayūru, in Pākanāḍu (perhaps near Nellūru).[39] There is a sense in which he offers us a non-Brahmin, or Kṣatriya, poetics, distinct from both Nannaya and Tikkana on the one hand, and from the other non-Brahminic, *dvipada* poets such as Somanātha on the other. Nanněcoḍa explicitly identifies the conceptual pair *mārga*—"pan-Indian," "supra-regional"—and *deśi,* "regional," which later served to express the kind of hierarchy of styles operative *within* Telugu (along the lines discussed above). But for Nanněcoḍa, *mārga* means, simply, Sanskrit; for him, *all* Telugu was *deśi.*

> Earlier, there was poetry in Sanskrit, called *mārga.*
> The Chāḷukya kings and many others caused poetry to be born
> in Telugu and fixed it in place, as *deśi,* in the Andhra land. (1.23)

Given this definition, we nonetheless hear Nanněcoḍa demanding a radical Teluguization of both modes in the poetry he regards as best (*vastu-kavita*):

> When ideas come together smoothly in good Tenugu
> without any slack, and description achieves a style,
> and there are layers of meaning, and the syllables
> are soft and alive with sweetness, and the words
> sing to the ear and gently delight the mind,
> and what is finest brings joy, and certain flashes
> dazzle the eye while the poem glows like moonlight,
> and the images are the very image of perfection,
> and there is a brilliant flow of flavor,
> and both *mārga* and *deśi* become the native idiom,
> and figures truly transfigure, so that people of taste
> love to listen and are enriched
> by the fullness of meaning—
> that is how poetry works, when crafted
> by all real poets. (1.35)

This statement—and the long poem on the birth of the god Kumāra that it precedes—mark Nanněcoḍa as effectively the first *kāvya*-poet in Telugu. And yet he stands alone, a maverick whose textures and style were never followed. Telugu *kāvya* at its height emerges out of the poetic revolution propelled by Śrīnātha. Nanněcoḍa seems to reflect a consciousness of a strictly regional or local poetics, which also produced full-fledged theoretical statements such as Ketana's *Āndhra-bhāṣā-bhūṣaṇamu* (in the generation after

39. Nanněcoḍa, *Kumāra-sambhavamu* (Madras: Vavilla Ramasvamisastrulu and Sons, 1972), 1.53–54, describing his lineage and region. This work was rediscovered and published in the early twentieth century by Manavalli Ramakrishnakavi.

Tikkana) and Vinnakoṭa Pĕddana's *Kāvyâlaṅkāra-cūḍāmaṇi.*[40] Certain features of this regional poetics are intimated in Nannĕcoḍa's aesthetic program: an elevated but deeply idiomatic style (perhaps referred to by his term *jānu tĕnuṅgu,* also used by Pālkuriki Somanātha);[41] a density and compression in poetic statement; a notion of conscious construction (*kūrpu*) that, while common to all the classical poets, is conjoined with a belief in the innate or natural (*naisargika*) propensity of the poet to internalize all forms of knowledge; and a sense of the overpowering, physical effect of a good poem:

> An arrow shot by an archer
> or a poem made by a poet
> should cut through your heart,
> jolting the head.
> If it doesn't, it's no arrow,
> it's no poem.

It is also striking that Nannĕcoḍa introduces explicit attacks on unsuccessful poets (*kukavi-ninda*) who fail to meet the standards of this regional aesthetic, and also on bad critics. Elaborate images of what constitutes a good or bad poem are now present in the introduction to a *kāvya*-work:

> Good color, build, apparent softness:
> they're all there in a poor image, but if you look inside
> it's dead. That's what a bad poet makes.
> Good color, build, softness,
> inside and out: you find them
> in a living woman, and in good poems.
>
> If you look for good lines in a real poem,
> they're everywhere, in dense profusion.
> That is poetry. But if one goes on chattering
> and, by chance, a few lines
> come out well, like a blind man
> stepping on a quail,
> would you call that a poem?

Such attacks on the poetic antagonists become standard features of the introductory portions to *kāvya* works, but each time the antagonist is defined anew, in terms of the shifting and evolving poetic ideal. For Nannĕcoḍa, poetic failure is keyed to the image of what is possible in the best poem—a compacted profusion of expression, an organic quality of liveliness, inside

40. This same tradition continued down into the sixteenth century at Tirupati with the *Saṅkīrtana-lakṣaṇamu* of Tāḷḷapāka Cinna Tirumalâcārya.

41. Nannĕcoḍa, 1.35. This term, which has generated much discussion, remains rather unclear.

and out. The connoisseur immediately recognizes these features, while the critic of poor taste is seduced by cheap effects:

> Small minds cannot enjoy a good poem,
> full of flavor. They run to cheap poetry,
> like flies that pass by whole sugarcane
> and swarm around the chewed-up pulp.
>
> You can only learn about poetry
> from one who knows. There's nothing to be gained
> from one who doesn't. You need a touchstone,
> not limestone, to test gold.

Despite this highly articulated vision, Nannĕcoḍa's model remained outside the mainstream of the classical tradition for reasons still not understood.

ŚRĪNĀTHA: POETRY AND EMPIRE

By the fourteenth century, then, we have a ripening tradition, already extraordinarily rich in forms and resonance, with a range of available modes. An enormous effort to produce narratives, mostly from the epic and *purāṇas,* permeates the literary scene. These narratives are all in *campū* style, imbued with a Sanskritic atmosphere and imparting dignity to both language and theme. Mārana's *Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇamu,* Ĕṟṟāpragaḍa's *Nṛsiṃhapurāṇamu* and *Harivaṃśamu,* and Nācana Somanātha's *[Uttara]harivaṃśamu* are but a few of the major works. This vogue in *purāṇas,* in the *campū* style, continued all the way to the twentieth century. But the last decades of the fourteenth century and the first decades of the fifteenth also witnessed a great breakthrough in the literary-cultural domain with the appearance of the revolutionary figure of Śrīnātha, arguably the most creative poet in the entire history of this literature. Once again, the poet was aware of his own innovation. Śrīnātha is the first to attempt to produce in Telugu a version of Sanskrit *kāvya,* a task previously considered impossible or even taboo. Here is how Śrīnātha speaks of his achievement, with reference to the Sanskrit original of Śrīharṣa, the *Naiṣadhīya-caritra:*

> *. . . bhaṭṭa-harṣa-mahā-kavīśvaruṇḍu kavi-kulâdṛṣṭâdhva-pānthuṇḍ′ ŏnarcina naiṣadha-śṛṅgāra-kāvya-prabandha-viśeṣambunan aśeṣa-manīṣi-hṛdayaṃ-gamambugā śabdam′ anusariñciyun′ abhiprāyambu guriñciyu bhāvamb′ upalakṣiñciyu rasambu poṣiñciyun′ alaṅkārambu bhūṣiñciyun′ aucityamb′ ādariñciyun′ anaucityambu parihariñciyu mātṛkânusārambuna c̣eppa-baḍina yī-bhāṣā-naiṣadhakāvyamb[u] . . . vilasillun ā-candra-tārârkambu.*
>
> The erotic poem made by the great poet Bhaṭṭa Harṣa, who traveled paths unseen by other poets, is here rendered into Telugu in a way that makes use of the special features of the language, to touch the hearts of the wise—

> following the sound of the text, aiming at the poet's intention (*abhiprāya*), keeping the poetic feeling (*bhāva*) in view, supporting the mood (*rasa*), embellishing the figures of expression (*alaṅkāra*), taking care of propriety (*aucitya*) and avoiding impropriety (*anaucitya*), closely obeying the original. This Telugu *Naiṣadhamu* will last as long as the moons, the stars, the sun.[42]

This statement of translators' protocol is unique to Telugu literature; it shows us an intense awareness of the new enterprise Śrīnātha has undertaken. For the first time, a Sanskrit *kāvya* has been entirely transmuted into Telugu in a sustained and elevated style appropriate to the original text. What has Śrīnātha translated? He lists a series of separate components—sound, intention, feeling, mood, figuration, and propriety—all of which add up to an attempt to reproduce the texture of the Sanskrit. Sound lies at the root of this attempt and generates the real problem, given the obviously divergent phonoaesthetics of the two languages. Here is where the poet's originality is truly tested. Often in this text, the *Naiṣadhamu,* Śrīnātha appears to reproduce the phraseology of his model, sometimes to the point of lifting, verbatim, most of a verse. For this very reason, the tradition mocks him: when Śrīnātha showed his translation to Sanskrit pandits, they laughed at him and said, "Take your Telugu case-endings—*ḍu, mu, vu,* and *lu*—and give our Sanskrit text back to us." Even more trenchant an expression of this same view lies in the story that Śrīnātha, upon finishing his poem, sought the approval of a young poetic genius called Pillalamarri Pina Vīrabhadruḍu, whom Śrīnātha found playing in the street with his friends. The boy, called upon to judge Śrīnātha's complex *kāvya,* asked the poet how he had handled one of Śrīharṣa's arcane phrases: *gami-karmī-kṛta-naika-nīvṛtā* [literally, "having put into effect the verb 'to go' by wandering through many lands"]. Śrīnātha immediately recited his corresponding verse, with the "Telugu" phrase *gami-karmī-kṛta-naika-nīvṛtuḍanai* (that is, the Sanskrit original rendered verbatim, swallowed whole by the Telugu line with the sole addition of the Telugu first-person and adverbial endings *uḍan-ai).* Here are the two verses, in an attempt at English translation; one should bear in mind that the Sanskrit original is deliberately opaque, erudite, and enigmatic, its diction elevated to a point of near-absurdity (which is, in a sense, the point)—while Śrīnātha's Telugu rendition, although almost entirely couched in Sanskrit, has a happy grace and ease. The context is the first meeting between Prince Nala and the famous captive goose, who has seen the lovely Damayantī and wants to make Nala fall in love with her:

> *sarasīḥ pariśīlituṃ mayā gami-karmī-kṛta-naika-nīvṛtā*
> *atithitvam anāyi sā dṛśoḥ sad-asat-saṃśaya-gocarodarī//*[43]

42. Śrīnātha, *Śṛṅgāra-naiṣadhamu* (Hyderabad: Telugu Vijnanapitham, 1985), 8.202.

43. Śrīharṣa, *Naiṣadhīya-carita* (Delhi: Lachhmandas Publications, 1986 [reprint of the Nirnaya Sagara Press Edition]), 2.40.

A connoisseur of lakes and pools,
I lay claim to the verb "to go,"
having made "going"
my vocation, peripatetically
progressing from land to land.
That is how I entertained her in my vision
for a moment, though I can't be certain
I saw her waist, which may,
or then again may not,
be there.

Like all beautiful Hindu women, Damayantī is so thin at the waist that one can legitimately wonder if her body *has* a middle part at all. The bird is evidently well-trained in grammar, as we see from the critical compound cited above, "recycled" by Śrīnātha in the first of two verses based on the Sanskrit prototype:

kamalendīvara-ṣaṇḍa-maṇḍita-lasat-kāsāra-sevā-ratin
gami-karmī-kṛta-naika-nīvṛtuḍanai kaṇṭin vidarbhambunan
ramaṇin pallavapāni padmanayanan rākendubimbānanan
sama-pīna-stanin astī-nāsti-vicikitsā-hetu-śātodarin[44]

Since I delight in pools
adorned with lotuses and lilies,
I lay claim to the verb "to go,"
having made "going"
my vocation, peripatetically
progressing from land to land.
That's how I saw her, in Vidarbha,
a ravishing woman, her hands like vines,
eyes like lotuses, her face—
the moon in all its fullness,
with two equally full breasts
and a waist so tiny you might wonder
if it is or isn't
truly there.

Obviously, Śrīnātha has completely "re-Sanskritized" the verse, which has only a single Dravidian root (the finite verb, *kaṇṭin,* "I saw"); all the rest is a combination of elegant and playful invention (in the long composita) on the one hand, and a mellifluous cumulation of familiar metaphors and attributes (the conventional descriptions of Damayantī's beauty) on the other. Within this ludic reshuffling of the given terms of the message, the refractory compound in question now stands out in all its ostentatious ob-

44. Śrīnātha, 2.21, correcting *-pīta* to *pīna.*

scurity and in brilliant contrast to the clarity and predictability of the remaining assimilated Sanskrit forms. Śrīnātha has both internalized and reframed this phrase in a manner that exposes its peculiar grandiosity for what it is, a plaything for pandits situated somewhere very close to incipient irony.

None of this, however, was apparently capable of impressing the young Vīrabhadrakavi, who is said to have remarked with scorn, on the basis of this example—like the Sanskrit pandits mentioned earlier—that Śrīnātha's version of Śrīharṣa's *kāvya* was limited to sprinkling in the occasional *ḍa* or *ai*.[45] Reading through the *Naiṣadhamu,* one can sometimes see why he (speaking for the literary tradition) adopts this sardonic view. As always, the folk-literary-critical narrative makes an incisive comment, although it fails, in this case, to illuminate the subtleties of Śrīnātha's Sanskritizing techniques, often deeply transformative of tone despite the surface impression of wholesale, almost mechanical transposition of entire blocks of Sanskrit. If anything, the Telugu *Naiṣadhamu* seems to bear out a happy speculation by Seferis:

> My fancy sometimes reaches even this absurd limit: if all the poets of the world were permitted to use one word only—the same word—the good poets would still find a way to differ from each other and create with this single word different personal poems (a thought that verges on Zen).[46]

We might also invoke the shade of Borges's hero Pierre Menard, "the author of Don Quixote," whose early twentieth-century version of Cervantes' classic presents us with passages *identical* to the seventeenth-century original, but entirely different in tone and meaning in their new cultural and temporal context. "The text of Cervantes and that of Menard are verbally identical, but the second is almost infinitely richer. (More ambiguous, his detractors will say; but ambiguity is a richness.)"[47]

The story we have cited highlights both the radically innovative nature of Śrīnātha's work and the tradition's resistance to it. A given verse of Śrīnātha's *Naiṣadhamu* may look and sound remarkably like—indeed, almost identical to—Śrīharṣa's original verse, but in fact it is always something quite new, and entirely Telugu. This is the true miracle of transubstantiation. However, the tradition also mocks this miracle. In effect, Śrīnātha has subverted the older distinction between *mārga* ("high," "Sanskritic") and

45. Pandipeddi Chenchayya and M. Bhujanga Rao Bahadur, *A History of Telugu Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928; reprint, New Dehi and Madras: Asian Educational Services, 1988), 61–62; Bommakanti Srinivasacaryulu, introduction to *Śṛṅgāra-śākuntalamu,* by Pillalamarri Pina Vīrabhadrakavi (Vijayawada: Emesco Classics, 1990), xi–xii.

46. George Seferis, *A Poet's Journal: Days of 1945–1951* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1974), 140.

47. Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones* (New York: Grove Press, 1962), 45–55.

deśi ("regional," "local," "Telugu"). Until this moment, any Telugu work was by definition *deśi.* But from now on, the boundaries of *mārga* and *deśi* are not linguistic but purely hierarchical: a *mārga* work can exist within Telugu, in distinction from *deśi*-Telugu forms. It is this new claim to status that the story objects to, and that Śrīnātha boasts of when he describes himself as *āndhra-bhāṣa-naiṣadhâbja-bhavuḍu,* "the Creator-God of the *Naiṣadha* text in Telugu."

But the actual achievement can be more precisely defined. Śrīnātha's claim is to have translated Sanskrit *kāvya* into Telugu *kāvya.* In fact, however, *kāvya* is not really a genre, but admits tremendous variation, and Śrīnātha works his own particular transformation on the Sanskrit model. Again, we need to look at a specific example. Here is Śrīharṣa's description of the women of India in relation to the as-yet-unmarried Nala:

śriyāsya yogyâham iti svam īkṣitum
kare tam ālokya surūpayā dhṛtaḥ/
vihāya bhaimim apadarpayā kayā
na darpanaḥ śvāsa-malīmasaḥ kṛtaḥ/[48]

"I'm a match for him, aren't I?"
A rush to the mirror. Despair.
The image clouded by a sigh.
So it goes, with one exception,
for every woman in the world.

The Sanskrit is so densely compacted that the initial effort merely deciphers it, restoring some kind of linear syntax. Śrīnātha, however, narrativizes the verse, producing an expanded and well-defined sequence of events leading up to the suggestion of Damayantī's unique beauty:

kori līlā-geha-kuḍya-bhāgambula
vrayudur'ammahīśvaruni mūrti
vrāsi kanyātva-gauravamu vīsara -vova
darśintur'anurāga-taraḷa-dṛṣṭi
darśiñciy atanik'e ṯaguduno taganoy añc'
iñcuk'iñcuka saṃśayintur'ātma
saṃśayiñci karâmbujamula ḵrommincuṭ-
addamul' ĕtti cūturu tammu dāru
rājakanyalu jagatin ākramamun'andu
ḵandu vārala niṭṭūrpu gādpuvedi
mukuḷamulu cāru-mohana-mūrtiy anaga
p̱aragu damayantī-ceti darpaṇamu dakka (1.70)

48. Śrīharṣa, 1.31.

They want him. So they draw his picture on their bedroom walls.
Then they stare at it with longing—against the rules for a virgin.
Staring, they start to wonder: "Am I good enough for him, or not?"
Wondering, they grab the mirror to study themselves.

All the princesses of the world go through these stages,
and all the mirrors go blank, clouded by sighs of despair,

except the one held by Damayantī,
of surpassing beauty.

In the Sanskrit, the word order completely masks the narrative order: "Am I a match for him?"—to see themselves—in the hand—seeing him—by a beautiful woman—held—except for Damayantī—deflated—by which [such beautiful woman]—was the mirror—by a sigh—unclouded?" The reader struggles to reconstruct a more intelligible syntactic pattern, which would follow the natural sequence of events. It is this sequence that Śrīnātha has strung out and re-imagined. Moreover, each phase of the sequence is marked by a repetition, in nonfinite form, of the previous finite verb: "They stare. . . . staring." This kind of repetition constitutes a figure in *alaṅkāra* texts: *mukta-pada-grasta,* "picking up the earlier word."[49] Not only does the figure serve to highlight the continuity and its recurrent, and universal, elements, it also sets off the uniqueness of the poem's striking denouement, in which Damayantī comes to constitute a set of one. Her, and her alone, the mirror does not disappoint. Even she, it seems, has run to check out her beauty, with the same doubt in her mind that afflicts all other women, but in her case, the doubt is ultimately dispelled. This is not merely a technical triumph, the final decision in a beauty contest. What Śrīnātha has succeeded in suggesting is that there is something unique in Damayantī's presence, a hint of subjectivity and entirely individual potentiality—almost as if she were herself emerging from the mirror.[50] Of course, in a sense, the same conclusion is implicit in Śrīharṣa's verse, though it appears so densely and intricately compressed and so deeply hidden by the nonlinear syntax that one can reach it only by a process of logical deduction. It is this logical progression that Śrīnātha turns into a lyrical statement, wholly unpacking the Sanskrit puzzle and ultimately projecting the image of a living, irreducily unique woman. Another way to state the difference is to notice how a near-total nominalization in the Sanskrit verse—a series of nouns and their modifiers—turns into a straightforward verbal series that completely dominates the Telugu poem.

49. The pattern is well-known already in Vedic texts; see S. Migron, "*Catena* and *Climax* in Vedic Prose," *Die Sprache* 35 (1991–93), 71–81.

50. We owe this observation to Don Handelman.

While this example may be slightly more vivid than usual in Śrīnātha's reworking of the *Naiṣadhīya* text, it does illuminate the poetic mode that Śrīnātha has invented. It still tends more toward lyrical narrative than toward the deliberately nonlinear, timeless, self-reflecting expression of Śrīharṣa's Sanskrit *kāvya*. We are still some way away from the full-fledged, autonomous *kāvya*-world of the sixteenth-century Telugu poets—for whom, however, Śrīnātha has opened the way.

Naiṣadhamu is the earliest of Śrīnātha's extant works. Already it contains many of the hallmarks of his mature style—a dimension of full-throated orality and musicality, where the words flow with ease without losing their scholarly elevation; a gift for producing, perhaps even improvising, a long Sanskrit compound without scuttling the Telugu syntax; and above all, the alchemical power to do things with language that bring a reality into existence. In a sustained way, these features blended together to produce, elaborate, and establish an entire temple, that of Dakṣârāma in the Konaśima delta. Śrīnātha's *Bhīmeśvara-purāṇamu* became the foundational text for this shrine, which it more or less sang into existence in its medieval (Hindu) form.[51] *Bhīmeśvara-purāṇamu* is a symphony swelling slowly to a pitch of almost unimaginable presence, as the poet calls the god himself down into the shrine. This is a text which cannot be retold or paraphrased, only performed and re-performed, creating its own reality anew each time. It is, from a certain perspective, not unlike a Vedic text, pregnant with mantric power (in the sense of bringing a world into existence, not simply of controlling an already existing reality or coercing a presence). But these same qualities are abundantly evident in many of Śrīnātha's individual stanzas, or even in single lines.

He had his own way of stating this aesthetic, at the start of *Bhīmeśvara-purāṇamu:*

> *hara-cūḍā-hariṇāṅka-vakratayu ḳālānta-sphurac-caṇḍikā-*
> *paruṣodgāḍha-payodhara-sphuṭa-taṭī-paryanta-kāṭhinyamun*
> *sarasatvambunu sambhaviñcĕn anagā sat-kāvyamul dikkulan*
> *cira-kālambu naṭiñcucuṇḍu kavi-rājī-geha-raṅgambulan*

A little crooked
like the crescent moon on Śiva's head,

sharp as the contours
of the firm, quickened breasts of the goddess
roused to fury at the end of time,

51. On the probable Buddhist prehistory of Dakṣârāma, see our forthcoming essay.

yet soft and delicious:

good poetry is all of this together,
dancing
wherever poets live. (1.11)

Three features produce poetry for Śrīnātha: a curved line that suggests the potential full (rounded) form; a firmness, almost toughness, replete with some destructive energy that is also somehow erotic and creative; and a fluid, seductive softness. At the center of the series is the goddess, angry, intent upon putting an end to time, her breasts thrilling at this prospect—but, for Śrīnātha, they are still breasts, attractive, possibly nurturing, enticing, womanly. The compound that says all this takes up almost half of the verse, connecting to the first two lines in a single syntagma crackling with sharp dentals and retroflexes: *kālânta-sphurac-caṇḍikā-paruṣodgāḍha-payodhara-sphuta-taṭī-paryanta-kāṭhinyamun*. Here everything is distinct, sharply outlined, yet still musical, with a suggestion of tactile softness. This is just how a good poem should work—at the edge of temporality, almost transcending time itself; destructive if misunderstood or misappropriated; and rewarding to a devoted listener. Everything depends upon the blend, as the verb *sambhaviñcu*—a co-occurrence, a coming together—indicates. Or we might picture this as a process actually undergone in the course of listening to this, or any other, good verse: the articulated point at the end of time (*kālânta*), where disjunction and discontinuity are present with other harsh boundaries, is superseded by the liquid internal state of softness (*sarasatva*) which is continuous, nonspecific, untimed (*cira-kālam*)—an unbroken movement, a dance.

The result is a new kind of poetry, a new, dynamic line, resonant with oral energy, breaking the bounds of earlier poetic forms. And what is true of the individual line is also true of this poet's traditional biography, which sets up a new model for poetic identity. In fact, Śrīnātha is the first Telugu poet to have a full-fledged, orally elaborated biography, structured around oral verses attributed to him. These verses tell, for example, of his competition with the scholar-poet Ḍiṇḍima Bhaṭṭu at Vijayanagara; the contest ends, of course, with Śrīnātha's victory and the destruction of Ḍiṇḍima's bronze drum. Similar stories take Śrīnātha to other courts and other kings. The poet moves throughout Andhra and even beyond its geographical range, from patron to patron, kingdom to kingdom, drawing together this spatial map into a virtual literary empire of which he, Śrīnātha, is the emperor (*kavisārvabhauma*). This literary kingdom will eventually become the necessary prototype for the political structure created by the innovating Vijayanagara kings nearly a century after Śrīnātha.

So powerful is the creative presence of Śrīnātha that it engenders, within

his lifetime, parodic imitation. A younger contemporary, Vallabharāya, parodies the Śrīnātha style in his carnivalesque text, the *Krīḍâbhirāmamu*—a tour of the alleys and bordellos of Kākatīya Orugallu / Warangal. Vallabharāya also quotes whole verses by Śrīnātha, comically reframing them. This unique text, mixing something like acute ethnographic observation with radical antinomian imagination, reveals the new ecology of genres that Śrīnātha's poetic revolution made possible. In another sense, Vallabharāya may mark the outer limit of that revolution and the exhaustion of its original impulse. No one ever composed poetry like Śrīnātha again. At the same time, Śrīnātha refashioned the didactic *purāṇic* form and style that he inherited; each of the nominally *purāṇic* works of his that have survived—*Kāśī-khaṇḍamu, Hara-vilāsamu, Bhīmeśvara-purāṇamu,* and *Śiva-rātri-māhātmyamu*—is effectively a self-contained and integrated composition, elevated and uniformly sustained in tone, focused in theme and intent. In short, these are proto-*kāvyas,* considerably removed from the earlier *campū* style.

All of this adds up to a moment of far-reaching transition. The literary horizon has expanded enormously; so has the internal complexity of the individual poetic line and the individual stanza. A powerful integration of oral poetic features with fixed, classical forms has become possible. Institutionalized modes of *purāṇic* or Brahminical ritual, linked with the great temples of the delta as well as with Śrīśailam in the interior, have become reflected in literary production. Sanskrit has entered into the inner life of the poem in surprisingly innovative ways. Parody and other commentaries have appeared in relation to newly dominant texts. The image of the poet—his powers, his language—has shifted. A direct line leads from this set of features to Pĕddana, probably the most "classical" of all Telugu poets, whose work is unimaginable without Śrīnātha[52]—just as the Vijayanagara super-state could hardly be imagined without the role of this Emperor of Poets, *kavisārvabhauma.*

Pĕddana takes the poetic line to new levels of intensity, luminosity, and lucidity. At the same time, the impulsive orality and expressive extravagance of Śrīnātha have lost their usefulness for Pĕddana, who invents a more controlled, economical, and highly reflective style. His is also one of the strongest voices in what might be considered a thematic shift in Telugu literature: it is not by chance that Pĕddana chose for his text the story of Svārociṣa Manu, the First Man. *Manucaritra,* which tells the story, focuses on issues of generativity in the definition and genealogy of humankind.[53] But similar themes turn up consistently in the works of contemporaneous poets,

52. This despite the fact that Pĕddana does not mention Śrīnātha in his preface.

53. See D. Shulman, "First Man, Forest Woman: Telugu Humanism in the Age of Kṛṣṇadevarāya," in *Syllables of Sky,* ed. D. Shulman, 133–64. Also see the superb essay by Visvanatha Satyanarayana, *Allasānivāni allika jigibigi* (Vijayavada: V. S. N. and Sons, 1967).

including that of the great patron-king Kṛṣṇadevarāya (1509–1529). His *Āmukta-mālyada* is in a class of its own—a masterpiece of realistic observation and personal expression, stylistically unique. We must now attempt to define something of this far-reaching reframing of the poetic enterprise as we see it in the works associated with the heyday of the Vijayanagara court.

KĀVYA: REALITY IN THE MIRROR

The early sixteenth century marks the acme of the last major supra-regional state-system in south India, that of Vijayanagara, with its capital at Hampi in the western Deccan. As we have said, the poet-king Kṛṣṇadevarāya (1509–1529) has come—apparently since the mid–seventeenth century—to exemplify this period of political, military, economic, and cultural expansion. His rule also witnessed structural change in Vijayanagara society, with the mobilization of a new regional-based aristocracy directly tied to the royal center at Hampi and to the person of the king.[54] The literati and courtiers drawn from the ranks of these families were the first audience for a major breakthrough in the literary domain. In the hands of several poets of genius, Telugu *kāvya* came into its own, assuming a form distinct from well-known Sanskrit *kāvya* modes. The Vijayanagara poets produced complex, visionary narratives that are self-contained, stylistically sustained, and thematically integrated; each such work also reflects the inimitable voice of its author, who claims credit for his creation.

Like Nannaya long before them, the major sixteenth-century *kāvya*-poets, such as Pĕddana, Kṛṣṇadevarāya, and the somewhat later Bhaṭṭumūrti/Rāmarājabhūṣaṇa, knew they were doing something unprecedented. Pĕddana, for example, has his patron-king, Kṛṣṇadevarāya, refer to him—the outstanding poet at his court—in the following terms:

> You're my friend, a master of crafted speech.
> Your memory holds the meaning
> of incomparable texts—*purāṇas, āgamas,*
> *itihāsas,* all rich in story.
> You are the creator of Telugu poetry.
> No one can equal you. (1.15)

This verse forms part of the king's invitation to Pĕddana to compose a book on the subject of the First Man, Svārociṣa Manu. In explaining his invitation, the king (as cited by the poet himself) defines the poet as *āndhra-kavitā-pitāmaha,* "the creator of Telugu poetry," who has a living memory linked to the whole of the earlier tradition. Not only has the poet learned the texts, but he has internalized their meanings in a manner that provides depth for

54. Cynthia Talbot is preparing a prosopography of early sixteenth-century Vijayanagara.

his creative resources. In this way, this new type of poet combines two features: an innovative capacity (he is *catura-vaco-nidhi,* "a master of crafted speech") and a connectedness to the great texts whose meanings he reinvents from within his own capacity. This combination underlies the new poetic style and allows the poet to see himself as the creator of poetry itself.

Let us examine one of Pĕddana's invocatory verses to the *Manucaritramu* in order to see something of what the new *kāvya* means. Here is a prayer to Gaṇeśa, the elephant-headed god, seen as a child sucking at his mother Pārvatī's breast:

> *aṅkamu jeri śaila-tanayā-stana-dugdhamul′ ānu-veḷa bāl-*
> *yâṅka-viceṣṭa ṯuṇḍamunan avvali can ḵabalimpa boyiy ā*
> *vaṅka ḵucambu gānak′ ahi-vallabha-hāramu ḵānci ve mṛṇā-*
> *ḷâṅkura-śaṅkan aṇṭĕḍu gajâsyuni ḵŏltun abhîṣṭa-siddhikin*
>
> Seated on his mother's lap,
> sucking at her breast,
> playing, as a child plays,
> he moves his trunk
> to grab the other breast.
> And there is no breast there.
> Instead, he finds a snake
> hanging from the neck—or is it
> a succulent lotus stem? Wondering,
> he holds it—the god who brings me luck. (1.4)

There are three superimposed elements of desire and illusion: the young child reaches for his mother's second breast, which isn't there (since Pārvatī is here the left, female half of Śiva's androgynous form, Ardhanārīśvara); he finds, instead, the snake-necklace draped around Śiva's neck; and he mistakes the snake for something no less tasty to him than the breast, that is, the lotus-stalk so similar in texture to the snake. Is the child frustrated? Not at all. Is his mistake a mistake? Only in a certain technical sense. In "reality," the superimposed or imaginatively recognized object is no less substantial than the one originally sought. This kind of creative illusion, or projection, is characteristic of the mature *kāvya* world, where the poet's creation can stand on a par with any external universe. The story he tells is thus an autonomous, fully existing, organic creation, produced entirely within language, and language here also contains the material world, residually present as memory, as we saw in the case of the definition of a poet above. Neither of these worlds—that of the poem or story and that outside it—needs to rival the other. True, there is some awareness of "illusion"—the god's mistake, substituting one thing for another in his mind—yet this apparent mistake has the quality of a happy and even generative projection. Compare this

verse, for example, to the common Vedāntic analogy of the rope taken to be a serpent; there, the mistake is to be corrected, just as normal, that is befuddled, perception is to be transcended by the experience of an ultimate, divine truth. But in this *kāvya* mode, the apparent mistake is really a creative necessity, not meant to be overturned but rather to be extended, played with, and enjoyed.

This entire process becomes a theme throughout Pĕddana's great poem, in which the beautiful Varūthini, who has fallen in love with the Brahmin Pravara and been rejected by him, "mistakes" a love-stricken *gandharva* male for her lost lover, makes love to him, and thus, through a further series of displacements, becomes the progenitor of the first human being. Everything depends on the creative illusion, which ultimately generates a real world. Pĕddana's text is thus sprinkled with verses like the one just discussed, where one thing is lovingly taken for another. The *kāvya* poets are fascinated with this playful movement, internal to language and consciousness, and its existential and experiential consequences.

If we look at the way the above verse is put together, we see a single continuous sentence with a narrative sequence, in complex hypotactic embeddedness, entirely subordinated as modifiers to *gajâsya,* the "elephant-headed god." Syntactic complexity of this sort constitutes a major step forward in the formation of *kāvya.* At the same time, the "narrative" is itself pregnant with cultural information that is simply assumed to exist in the mind of the listener: Gaṇeśa has an elephant's head; Śiva is divided in his body into female and male halves; he has snakes around his neck; and so on. The verse has no need to retell the story in the more straightforward narrative syntax familiar from earlier periods. Rather, satiated as it is with the memory of this knowledge, the culture can revisit it only at a higher level of complexity, reintegrating the various elements into a new syntactic pattern where narrative becomes an adjective and the elements making up this narrative can be playfully interchanged. It is as if the language that contains this world had turned in upon itself in order to explore the details and arrangement of its own inner space. Within this space, projection, memory, mirroring, and perceptual disjunction are the main creative features.

We can illustrate this turn with two more "mirror" verses, each emblematic, in its own way, of the new *kāvya* style and themes. Listen to the way Kṛṣṇadevarāya begins his great text, the *Āmukta-mālyada,* invoking his personal deity, Viṣṇu / Veṅkaṭeśvara at Tirupati:

śrī-kamanīya-hāra-maṇi cĕnnuga ṯānunu ķaustubhambunan
dā kamalā-vadhūṭiyun′udārata ṯopa ṗarasparâtmal′an-
d′ākalitambul′aina tamay ākrtul′acchatā ṗaiki ṯociy a-
stokatan andu ṯocĕn ana śobhilu veṅkaṭa-bharta ķōlcĕdan

He can be seen on the goddess,
in the sheen of her pendant.
And she is there on the jewel he wears,

as if their images of one another
that had been held inside them
had come out clearly, and were mirrored.

Such is the lord of Veṅkaṭam,
the god I serve. (1.1)

Once again we have three levels, sequenced and linked. One—although this level is almost entirely unexpressed in the verse—is that of the two figures standing, as it were, in some visible, external world. They are, however, seen not in this freestanding mode but rather as reflected in each other's ornaments, each thus seeing himself or herself on the surface of the other; this is level two. But we then learn that these reflections are really like externalizations of the deeply internalized images each one carries of the other in mind or heart (*ātmal′andu*). This is the third, perhaps most important level, which is made to coalesce with level two—that of the mirror images. One actually forgets, reading the poem, that in between the inner image and its reflection in the jewels there exists the full-fledged "objectified" presence standing before the poet's eyes (and of course, if we wished, we could regard his inner visualization and linguistic embodiment of the god as yet a fourth, and perhaps fifth, level). Indeed, the objective, outer stance seems intended *only* to bring about the coalescence of the depth image with its reflection. Put differently, the apparent reality—the mirror vision—is brought into relation with, or indeed merged into, the "real" reality of the inner image expressed outward. The several levels are present, quite explicitly, in the repeated forms of the verb *tocu,* "to appear, to seem to be, to occur in the mind": first the infinitive/nonfinite *ṯopa* in the second line, referring to the reflections as seen by the "normal" lay observer (a face and its mirror image); then *(paiki) ṯoci* in the third line, the inner images coming out; and finally the finite verb *ṯocĕn* in the fourth, the complete, full appearance of the god and goddess. More precisely, the final *ṯocĕn* explains the earlier *ṯopa;* that is, it uncovers the depth and reality of the mirror image, which is no longer, in any sense, a reflection.

This rather nonlinear progression can be restated discursively. The mirror image is *not* of the outer, concrete object (were this the case, the mirror image would be unreal). What the mirror shows is not a reflection but a reality. The inner images of the two deities have emerged and now inhabit the space of the mirror. There is a notion of fullness and clarity in this "appearance," as intimated by the adverb *astokatan,* which bridges the gap between the penultimate and ultimate lines—the final emerging into visibility is full, whole, and literally "not diminished." Syntactically, the key to the

entire revelation lies in the marker *ana,* "as if": the Lord of Veṅkaṭam is "as if" there, "as if" he were standing visibly outside in some objectified dimension. In fact, he is *less* real than the image inside the mirror, which is, the poet insists, the actual inner reality brought into being. And once again, the sequence is couched in the form of a single complex sentence, embedding within it a series of clauses, each linked to one of the three primary levels of perception and existence. At the height of this sentence, when the epiphany is complete, we find the hint of subjunctivity, the "as if" that marks off what is full from what is less than whole. Listening to this sentence, replaying it in the mind, one is, in effect, sucked into the mirror, into a space of conflated contours and ever more deeply embedded levels of perception—an infinite, self-generating, self-bounded space, opened up by language and immensely real.

We could also say that, in *kāvya* of this kind, language has syntactically cut loose from external reference, although external reality continues to inhere in it in all its potential fullness. In this light we can understand better the extreme tangibility and concreteness of Kṛṣṇadevarāya's descriptions of real-life scenes and events. This is realism of a different kind than what we might encounter in Western literatures, where language subserves a supposedly outer reality. Here external reality subserves language, which enhances and intensifies its ontology. We have to emphasize that this view is totally remote from the romantic understanding of a purely internal world of felt essences, a world that supersedes the material one. There is nothing romantic about Kṛṣṇadevarāya's *kāvya.* Rather, the poem, like the mirror above, holds the real presence, only making it more real than anything outside language.

A very self-conscious variation on this same vision occurs in Rāmarājabhūṣaṇa's invocation to the goddess of speech, Sarasvatī, at the start of his *Vasu-caritramu:*

> *ramaṇīyâkṣa-sarâkṛtin p̲olucu varṇa-śreṇi vīṇânulā-*
> *pamucetan k̲aragiñciy andu nija-bimbamb′ ŏppan acchâmṛta-*
> *tvamun′ātma-pratipādakatvamunu ṭad-varṇâḷiy and′ ĕlla pūr-*
> *ṇamu k̲āviñcina vāṇi tirmala-mahā-rāyokti p̲olcun k̲ṛpan*
>
> Playing the vina, she melts down
> the string of syllables she holds,
> so that each contains her image,
> and each, eternal and transparent,
> is also full of self. This goddess,
> this language, lives in the words
> of our king. (1.4)

Speech—Vāṇī, who is Sarasvatī—holds in her hand an *akṣa-sara,* a string of beads identified here as the phonemes that constitute language. But the

nonverbal music of her vina here melts these seemingly solid syllable-beads into a liquid state that is perfectly clear, transparent—thus reflecting the image of the goddess, or of language—and also eternal, beyond time or sequence. At the same time, this ultimate linguistic act brings into being a state of fullness, in which the self is inevitably and integrally present (*ātma-pratipādakatvamu*). Whose self? Whoever speaks. And since whoever speaks is, at the moment, the goddess of language herself, it is also her self that is fully reflected back to her with each syllable. One could also say that, by this definition, any poetic use of language marks, and creates, the living subject and his or her subjectivity. This is a process in which the inherent musicality of poetry overwhelms the congealed, routinized forms of everyday speech (which lacks the transparency of poetry). And if, in Kṛṣṇadevarāya's statement above, we find external reality subsumed within language, here it is the speaking self that is subsumed. Together, these two verses offer a complete picture of language in both its objective and subjective aspects, seen as completely without conflict; both are necessary for the fully creative work of language. The exploration of these aspects, from a point within language, is the outstanding task of the *kāvya* poet.

ĀMUKTA-MĀLYADA: REALISM AND BEYOND

The new *kāvya* aesthetic, fully developed at the royal court in Vijayanagara in the first half of the sixteenth century, allowed for striking individual variation sustained through long, internally coherent works, though common to all of them is the fascination with the autonomous and encompassing powers of the word and with the internalization of this creative potential in the living human subject. An emergent subjectivity of a new type—in certain ways recognizably linked to earlier developments in Śrīnātha and others, and to a cultural substratum of resilient individualism at work in the Tĕlaṅgāṇa cult of heroism[55]—speaks to us in a chorus of mature voices from this period. One strand is evident in the courtly *kāvya* of Kṛṣṇadevarāya, who presents us with remarkable, minutely realistic descriptions of everyday life:

> *tŏḍibaḍan ammal′akkal′ani tūlucu dīnata doyil′ŏggucun*
> *vaḍa mari tera deran ala vākyamul′ĕnnaka momu gubbalun*
> *gaḍu kŏnu kakṣa-dīptulun ĕgādiga gan-gŏnu ciṭṭakampu drā-*
> *guḍu gani sannalan nagiri krolpaka pānthu prapāprapālikal*

55. See, for example, the Śrīnātha verse on mirrors discussed on pp. 30–31. On the hero (*vīra*) as model, see the Vīraśaiva *dvipada* texts such as Pālkuriki Somanātha's *Basava-purāṇamu.*

Travelers approach, faint with thirst, exhausted men calling,
"Sister, Mother, please give us water"—
and as water is poured into their cupped hands,
they drink, then little by little, forgetting what they said,
they look up at the girls, at faces, breasts,
the supple curves fully in view
beneath their arms, and now they're staring,
stealing looks, pretending to drink
as if still thirsty, when the girls notice and, hinting
to each other with their eyes, stop the flow
and smile. (2.59)

It is the height of the hot season: booths are set up for wayfarers, to give them water. The young women who pour water into the outstretched hands of these thirsty travelers are standing slightly above them. As they revive, the men forget their former distress and switch modes, and the women note this as a reliable signal for them to stop pouring. It all happens in the eyes, a rich and silent communication against the backdrop of the trickling water. The effect is akin to a compressed drama, in four lines amazingly full of movement: the men come shaking and shivering, stretching out their hands, with nothing but thirst on their minds; they drink and gradually recover, their heads initially lowered into their cupped hands; as thirst recedes, the heads are raised and the eyes look up, engaged in what a new frame has to offer—breasts, armpits, faces. Still, they have to pretend to go on drinking, so they look down again, or back and forth, though the game is transparent to the girls, who signal to one another with their eyes that it is time to stop. Still, the play continues with their smile, as if the poem had done away with closure. The poet's eye moves with the internal movement he is depicting, both physical and mental, as if a series of close-up frames were quickly strung together in sequence (syntactically, as usual in high *kāvya,* there is a single complex sentence with its series of dependent clauses). A tremendous activity stretches the verse to its limits, or beyond them, extending outside the poem. And this sense of bubbling movement also comes through in the phonological configuration of the lines: the early part of the verse is dominated by repeated dentals (t, d), highlighting the demand of the tongue, thirsty for water, striking dryly against the teeth; the middle section is rich in playful gutturals (k, g), indicating, perhaps, the pretense of drinking, once the initial thirst has been satisfied; and the poem ends with a powerful series of liquid bilabials, lips smacking in delight, or even pursed for a kiss. Moreover, the double nasals in the middle of the last line—*sannalan nagiri*—actually force the lips apart, revealing the teeth in a smile that imitates the girls' culminating smiles; there is no way to recite the verse without reaching this point. The reader/reciter is compelled to undergo the same process experienced by

the actors in the poem. This final moment also offers us, at last, the proper subject of the verse—*prapāprapālikal,* the "water girls"—as if the poet had finished his vignette and needed only to give it a title. So characteristically convoluted and dense is the texture that he could also be said to have signed it.

This verse is, of course, part of a longer passage devoted to the hot season (such seasonal depictions being a staple of *kāvya*), all this a prelude to the king's visit to his courtesan's house. Thus the erotic tinge foregrounds the narrative event that is to follow. More generally, however, it is important to note that verses like the above, with their pointed observations drawn from experiences of real life, are embedded in a text which is also erudite, philosophical, and at times dreamily imaginative, as if drawing on experience from another world. These seemingly disparate domains—meticulous realism, doctrinal erudition and precision, and baroque imagination—merge into a coherent whole organized by the narrative frame. There is much more that could be said about that frame and its thematic drives; something of the force implicit in the choice of story can, perhaps, be sensed in the dream-narrative that the poet relates at the beginning of the book, when his personal god requests him to compose the poem.[56] Everywhere, there is a startling profusion of detail: the Brahmin Viṣṇucitta goes off to a scholarly dispute in Madurai, and his wife packs him provisions for the way. We hear exactly, in mouthwatering detail, what kind of food he prefers, how it is prepared ("tamarind and spiced jaggery in equal portions for sambar," *cĕrakaḍamu sābāl′ūnpa jĕlagu sambārampu jintapaṇḍu,* 2.97), and which servant should carry what. This same wealth of minute description is then applied to the actual philosophical debate. The same drive toward precise observation and articulation is operative throughout. There is no distinction whatsoever in level; the kitchen merits the same attention as the scholars' chambers or the royal court, and the poet-king is equally at home—alive, observing, internalizing, recording, and making connections—in all of these milieux.

His voice is absolutely distinctive, that of an integrated and self-conscious subject. He sees the world differently than any earlier poet, with an extraordinary sweep and magnanimity of vision expressed in a syntax that sometimes appears tortuous, replete with oddly compacted, sometimes phonologically harsh compounds. Rarely does a verse simply flow smoothly, in the more conventional matter. He also speaks of himself in this same highly energized, intensified, utterly unconventional mode; an example is in the colophon verses at the end of each canto:

56. See first selection from *Āmukta-mālyada* on pp. 168–70.

idi karnāṭa-dharā-dhṛti-sthira-bhujā-hevāka-labdhebha-rāḍ-
udayorvī-dhara-tat-pitṛvya-kṛta-navyopāyanoṣṇīṣa-rat-
na-dṛg-añcat-pada-kṛṣṇarāya-vasudhâdhyakṣoditâmukta-māl-
yadan āśvasamu hṛdya-padyamulan ādyambai mahin p̱ōlp′agun

This is the first chapter, in winsome verses,
of my splendid book called *Āmukta-mālyada.*
I, Kṛṣṇarāya, composed it—I, King of all the World,
holding in my firm arms the whole Karṇāṭa land,
the same arms that casually conquered Udayagiri Fort,
whose commander, the Gajapati's uncle, surrendered his crown
as a special offering to me, so that now my feet are colored
by its luminous gems (1.89).

One long, high-voltage Sanskrit compound contains a story: when Kṛṣṇadevarāya besieged Udayagiri Fort, Prahareśvara Pātra, the Gajapati king's uncle, held it successfully for some days. Kṛṣṇadevarāya became impatient and took a vow not to bathe that day until he had stamped on his opponent's head. Terrified, Prahareśvara Pātra sent his crown in lieu of his head, and Kṛṣṇadevarāya stepped on it and then bathed. The same self-confident, brazen excess runs through each of his verses and the book as a whole.

TEMPLE POETS: POTANA, ANNAMAYYA, DHŪRJAṬI

Kāvya, of the kind we have been exploring, belongs to the royal courts, or to a courtly mode. It presupposes a highly educated, elite audience of connoisseurs and a sustained network of patronage (or a merging of poet and patron-king, as in the case of Kṛṣṇadevarāya, just discussed). Patronage of this sort also reveals the latent structure of power relations between these figures: although it looks as if the poet were dependent upon his patron, in effect it is the poet who creates the latter as king.[57]

In stark contrast to this pattern and to the poetic works it produced stands the parallel and contemporaneous tradition of what we have called "temple poets," whose only patrons are the gods they worship. Such poets conventionally look with contempt at the court poets and their presumed sycophantic compulsions. The temple poet proudly refuses to dedicate his book to anyone but the god himself. Prototypical in this respect is Śrīnātha's contemporary Potana, the author of the Telugu *Bhāgavatamu,* who says explicitly:

57. See our essays in Barbara Stoller Miller, ed., *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992).

> I, Bamměra Potarāju, did not want to give my poem
> to those wretched human kings in return for a few villages,
> vehicles, or gold—all cheap pleasures. I didn't want to suffer
> God's hammer blows after death. So I give my poem freely
> to God, for the good of the world.[58]

Potana's text, though couched in the *campū* idiom with its conventional range of meters and prose, is entirely permeated by the tone of devotional surrender. His textures are soft, fluid, and relatively simple, though lexically often erudite.[59] Often one senses that this work of passionate devotion, like so many of the earlier Tamil *bhakti* texts, is meant to evoke, or actually to conjure up fully and realistically—that is, to create—the latent or hidden presence of the god. A line leads directly from this foundational text of Telugu Vaiṣṇava devotion to the rich developments at the great Tirupati temple in the fifteenth century, where Tāḷḷapāka Annamacarya (or Annamayya) produced his corpus of songs for Veṅkaṭeśvara-Viṣṇu.

Here is an example of one of Annamayya's poems:

> Anyone obsessed with making love
> would become like him.
>
> He's addicted to both his wives.
> That's why he needs four hands.
> He's done it thousands of times
> in all kinds of ways.
> No wonder he has so many forms.
>
> *Anyone would become like him.*
>
> He especially likes love after quarrels.
> That's why at times he turns his face away.
> He's handsome beyond compare. Playful, too.
> Notice his long fingernails.
>
> *Anyone would become like him.*
>
> Because he likes pleasure to last forever,
> he's come to live on this solid mountain.
> Bound to life in this world,
> he lives inside everyone.
>
> *Anyone would become like him.*[60]

58. Potana, *Āndhra-mahābhāgavatamu* 1.1.11. (Hyderabad: Andhra Pradesh Sahitya Akademi, 1977) Some have suggested that this verse is a later interpolation into Potana's work. On the opposition between court poets and temple poets, see the afterword by Narayana Rao in Hank Heifetz and Velcheru Narayana Rao, trans., *For the Lord of the Animals, the Kāḷahastīśvara Śatakamu of Dhūrjaṭi* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 143–62.

59. See discussion in David Shulman, "Remaking a Purāṇa: The Rescue of Gajendra in Potana's Telugu *Mahābhāgavatamu,*" in *Purāṇa Perennis: Reciprocity and Transformation in Hindu and Jaina Texts,* ed. W. Doniger (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 121–57.

60. Annamayya, *Adhyātma-saṅkīrtanalu,* Vol. 11, ed. Rallapalli Ananthakrishnasarma (Tirupati: Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanan, 1955), 243 [copperplate 17, from the long plates].

Annamayya uses a different register than the *kāvya* poets—a register developed for singing, in immediate and intimate tones. There is less aesthetic distancing than in the courtly works: Annamayya's songs are meant as direct communications to the god he worships, Veṅkaṭeśvara, for whom he is said to have composed a song a day for many decades. These songs can be celebrative, playful, erotic, meditative, and contemplative, sometimes all at once. There is an old classification (attested already in the generation after Annamayya) of all the surviving poems as either *adhyātmika* ("metaphysical") or *śṛṅgāra* ("erotic"). However, this broad division can be deceptive: the above poem, for example, is classed as metaphysical. The poems, known as *padam*s, were engraved on copper plates in the Tirupati temple in one of the most expensive publishing ventures of all times. Tradition says there were over 30,000 such poems, though the surviving corpus is roughly half that figure.[61] These poems were apparently lost for some centuries and rediscovered only at the beginning of this century, in a locked room of the temple, although there is some mystery about this story.

The *padam* genre in Telugu began with Annamayya, in the temple setting, and was continued in the works of his sons and grandsons there; later poets, such as Kṣetrayya in the seventeenth century and Sāraṅgapāṇi in the eighteenth, produced *padams* for courtesan-singers outside the temples. Each such poem was set to a *rāga* and meant to be sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument. The sheer inventiveness of the poets is evident in the amazing spectrum of themes and imagined situations (often love-vignettes of every possible variety). This is a poetry of what we might call "moods," in the sense that each poem calls up a wholly unique and irreducible emotional coloring, resistant to any typologizing, and each poem stands alone, a single experienced moment, unconnected formally to any of the others.[62]

From out of this mood-pregnant moment, a whole theology can be suggested. "Anyone would become like him": there is a hint, perhaps, of the goal of assimilation to the god, *sāyujya,* here somewhat ironically grounded in erotic obsession. And at times the god seems to turn his face away, to become inaccessible; the poet offers a rationale for this movement. What might border on ridicule, on the surface, actually hides a profound philosophical statement about god. He suffers from *kāmâturatvamu,* an addiction

61. See Veturi Anandamurti, *Tāḷḷapākakavula kṛtulu: Vividha sāhitī prakriyalu* (Hyderabad: Veturi Anadamurti, 1974), 93. The *devasthānam* at Tirupati has 2,701 copperplates containing works by the Tāḷḷapāka family (Annamayya, his sons, and his grandchildren). The corpus is still in a somewhat chaotic state, and no more precise figures are available.

62. Thus the Telugu *padams* are remote from the logic of the Tamil devotional corpus of Nammāḻvār, for example, where the poems are organized in self-contained chains or sets, the final word or phrase of one poem becoming the first word of the next (*antâdi*), and so on.

to desire; this supposedly underlies his need to have four hands and thousands of forms. Yet just below the surface, we see, without attempting to deeroticize the verse, the god's wish to save his many beloveds, and the infinite variety of experienced personae with which he encounters them. He is truly different each time he makes love. The human truth of this vision, which speaks to the uniqueness of each subjective moment, emerges fully in relation to the divine subject, who is also the subject of the poem—and who is also, as the final crescendo intimates, the inner subject of each of us.

Although the poet is describing his god, the tone is that of coming into contact with a familiar person, intimately known. But this person has unusual attributes: for example, the long fingernails—actually claws—with which Viṣṇu, as the Man-Lion, disemboweled the demon Hiraṇyakaśipu. These fingernails have here become part of a general depiction of the god's beauty. There is a consistent and subtle progression within the verses, each syntactically completed by the opening *pallavi* refrain, from the image of the human lover to the slowly crystallizing identification of him with the god of the Tirupati mountain—that is, with an entirely different existential plane—and then, at the culminating moment, with the inner ground of all being. This progression is carried along in a transparently light, even humorous style that manages to articulate the simultaneous distance and intimacy that the devotee feels vis-à-vis the god.

Annamayya was the pioneer of this style, but his direct descendants continued his work, eventually producing an immense Tāḷḷapāka corpus, in various genres, including a hagiography of Annamayya by his grandson Cinnanna. The latter work, *Annamâcārya-caritramu,* makes the opposition between court poets and temple poets entirely clear: the Vijayanagara king Sāḷuva Narasimha is said to have asked Annamayya to compose a song for him analogous to one he heard the poet recite to the god;[63] this request—natural enough in a period in which the king and deity were, in fact, merging into one within the new political culture we call Nāyaka (from the sixteenth century, the time of Cinnanna, on)—is said to have been met with violent scorn by the poet. The king imprisoned Annamayya, but the god freed him from his chains.[64] This story may anachronistically render the typological opposition too starkly; it remains true, however, that Annamayya's songs reflect a highly sensitized subjectivity, which may require the space of the autonomous relationship between poet and temple deity rather than

63. For this poem, an "erotic" (*śṛṅgāra*) *padam,* see Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and A. K. Ramanujan, *When God is a Customer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 49–50 (*emŏkŏ*).

64. Tāḷḷapāka Cinnanna, *Annamâcārya-caritramu* (Tirupati: Tirumala Tirupati: Devasthanam, 1949). On Nāyaka political culture, see Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nāyaka Period Tamilnadu.*

the burdens of relationship between the poet and another human being such as his patron.

Not all temple poets achieved this extremely personal idiom; not all of them used the space and freedom. The other major example, this time from a Śaiva context, is Dhūrjaṭi, probably of the sixteenth century. The literary tradition insists that Dhūrjaṭi underwent a transformation from one category to the other. Beginning as a court-poet with Kṛṣṇadevarāya, he became disgusted with this life, left the court, and came to reside at the temple of Kāḷahasti, near Tirupati in southern Andhra. There he composed two works: the *Kāḷahasti-māhātmyamu,* a *kāvya*-work on the foundation and local tradition of the temple, and the *Kāḷahastīśvara-śatakamu,* a century of highly reflective poems formally addressed to the god, Śiva, at Kāḷahasti. It is in this latter work, in the productive *śataka* genre,[65] that we hear the profound individuality of this poet's voice:

> You make us taste, see, hear, smell,
> touching body to body
> in deep delight.
> So why tell us these acts
> are wrong? Are you playing
> with us for fun, or just
> to pass the time?
> What's the point,
> Lord of Kāḷahasti?[66]

Often the rhetorical address to the god is hardly more than a device allowing the poet to explore his own inner landscape—especially the darker reaches of this inner world. In this sense, the communication is really within the poet, between parts of the self. The individual stanzas are crafted in the standard meters; but whenever a depth of inner feeling becomes so intense, language becomes lyrical in the extreme, heartrending in effect. Dhūrjaṭi is unusual precisely because of this set of features, but we find similar trends in the so-called prose-poems (*vacanamulu*) composed by other poets at other temples, such as Kṛṣṇamâcārya and Pĕda Tirumalâcārya (at Simhacalam and Tirupati, respectively).[67]

65. See Heifetz and Narayana Rao, *For the Lord of the Animals.*

66. Dhūrjaṭi, *Kāḷahastīśvara-śatakamu,* ed. Nidudavolu Venkata Rao (Vijayawada: Emesco, 1990), 75.

67. Kṛṣṇamâcārya, *Simhagiri-vacanamulu* (Simhacalam: Sri Simhacaladevasthanam, 1988) and Pĕda Tirumalâcarya, *Śrīveṅkaṭeśvara vacanamulu,* ed. Veturi Prabhakarasastri (Tirupati: Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam, 1945).

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY: GRAMMAR REVISITED

Mature, elegant, manifold: the tradition that produced the great *kāvyas* on the one hand, and the playful and precise mood-poems of Annamayya and Dhūrjaṭi on the other, had expanded its range and the sheer quantity of literary activity to an unprecedented degree throughout the sixteenth century, well past the collapse of the Tuluva dynasty and the loss of the imperial capital of Vijayanagara. Indeed, the new style and forms produced at the courtly center rapidly spread throughout the Telugu-speaking region, including, especially, small-scale courts in remote parts of Tĕlaṅgāṇa and further east, toward the coast. These dusty towns and villages, such as Nandyāla (home to Piṅgaḷi Süranna) and Kāmĕpaḷḷi (in Palnāḍu, associated with Appakavi),[68] gave birth to powerful new currents of literary and philosophical creativity. In some sense, as we have said, the classical tradition culminates in these works.

By the mid–seventeenth century, a new synthesis was clearly called for. It was at this point that the retrospective orientation toward Kṛṣṇadevarāya was fashioned, possibly by a new elite of largely left-hand castes that had come into its own in the political sphere. A literary mythology focused its vision on the court of this synoptic "great king," even as a rich system of oral commentary on the classical texts came into being.[69] This systemic elaboration and reorganization of the tradition seem to reflect a perceived disturbance in the literary world, exemplified primarily in works from the far south, in the Tamil country, where Telugu Balija families had established local Nāyaka states (in Senji, Tanjavur, Madurai, and elsewhere) in the course of the sixteenth century. Telugu poets at these Nāyaka courts experimented with new genres such as *yakṣagāna,* the courtly dance-drama, or the *abhyudayamu,* celebrative "biographies," now brought into the literary mainstream. Moreover, the themes that dominate this literature had shifted: in particular, there was a fascination with stories of social, moral, or sexual violation (Indra's seduction of Ahalyā, Candra's love affair with his guru's wife Tārā, and so on). Hitherto clearly distinct social or cultural categories were now mixed: thus the opposition between queen and courtesan was blurred (and courtesan-poetesses became a common feature of the courts); merchants and warriors fused in a world ruled by mobile, self-made men rooted not in inherited ownership of land but in the possession of acquired liquid wealth; and most striking of all, the king was now conflated with the god and wor-

68. Appakavi may actually have been born in Kākunūru, in western Tĕlaṅgāṇa (presently Mahbubnagar District).

69. We have discussed this formation in some detail in Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman, *A Poem at the Right Moment: Remembered Verses from Premodern South India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

shiped in this mode by his poets and courtesans, who had become his devotees. The poet no longer created the king by his poetry but served him in the devotional mode; and poetry as such was no longer tied to the scholarly establishment, with its Brahminical ideology, but was in the hands of non-Brahmin poets, the kings and their sons, and women. A massive reintrpretation of the social order is implicit in the new literary works.[70]

Partly in response to these developments, but also following on the new awareness of language and its power that emerges from the *kāvya* world, poet-scholars such as Appakavi took it upon themselves to reestablish the linguistic and literary value systems of the classical order. We can see in Appakavi's great text a mythology of grammar itself, projected backward onto the First Poet, Nannaya. According to Appakavi (reporting on what the god Viṣṇu tells him in a dream), Nannaya's "original" grammar, the *Āndhra-śabda-cintāmaṇi,* was destroyed by his rival Bhīmana; fortunately, Nannaya's student, Sāraṅgadhara (the son of King Rājarājanarendra), had memorized the whole book in childhood. This same Sāraṅgadhara was mutilated by his father for allegedly having coveted his stepmother, the beloved young wife of the king. But Sāraṅgadhara managed to give Nannaya's grammar to Bālasarasvati, from Mataṅga Hill (at Vijayanagara), and a Brahmin from this same site eventually delivered the book to Appakavi.[71] This story produces a chain of transmission authorized by Nannaya's prestige as the first poet, and therefore also the first grammarian; there is a perceived necessity for these two roles to stand together at the start of the tradition, now nicely tidied up in the retrospective mode. In effect, however, Appakavi has himself synthesized the floating materials of grammar in a new authoritative system.

> If you study my book before writing poetry yourself,
> your work will become famous. Otherwise,
> it's no use. (1.9)

At the same time, the incorporation of Sāraṅgadhara into the chain of transmission seems designed to address the themes of violation proceeding from the far south, where Sāraṅgadhara's story is the subject of one of the major *kāvya* texts (*Sāraṅgadhara-caritramu* of Cemakūra Veṅkaṭa-kavi).[72]

In line with this redefinition of the role of grammar, Appakavi reveals a deep awareness of language as creatively reworked by the poet:

> The wise say that poetry is the only form of knowledge.
> Is there any doubt of that? Poetry is the ultimate
> learning. To know it is to know the world. (1.53)

70. See discussion in Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance, Court and State in Nāyaka Period Tamilnadu.*

71. See the selection from Appakavi, pp. 230–38.

72. See Narayana Rao, Shulman, and Subrahmanyam, *Symbols* 125–35.

In this perspective, Appakavi forms part of a much wider reconceptualization of linguistic themes. This reformulation is not limited to Telugu alone; in Sanskrit grammar from roughly the same period, we find works such as Bhaṭṭoji Dīkṣita's *Siddhânta Kaumudī,* which entirely transform the internal organization of the classical Pāṇinian system—in large part, away from the generative direction of the latter and toward a more prescriptive and linear pattern. Outside the realm of grammar proper, and reaching toward a radical linguistic metaphysics perhaps unique in the Indian tradition, we find the complicated narrative *kāvya* by Piṅgaḷi Sūrana, *Kaḷāpūrṇodayamu,* from the mid–seventeenth century in Tĕlaṅgāṇa. This amazing work demonstrates "practically," one might say—in the course of telling its convoluted story—that speech *is* narrative, and narrative *is* reality, already implicit in the mere existence of subtle linguistic forms. Sūrana seems to take up and concretize philosophical positions, or intuitions, similar to those articulated by the great Sanskrit grammarian-philosopher Bhartṛhari in his *Vākyapadīya.* His fascination with making things through language also extends to a playful work of sustained paronomasia (*śleṣa*), the *Rāghava-pāṇḍavīyamu,* which tells simultaneously the stories of the *Rāmayaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata.*

Appakavi and Sūrana epitomize the widespread cultural interest in topics of language in this period that we find in the many oral verses (*cāṭus*) on metapoetic and metalinguistic topics. This orally circulating system of literary production and literary criticism also produced a specific image of the poet as the omniscient creator whose utterances can never go wrong, and who can thus make and unmake things—indeed, an entire world—with his words. We thus find at this moment of powerful reconceptualization and reorganization within the tradition—in effect, a time of stabilizing a classical canon and anchoring it in a shared universe of critical values and perceptions—several highly intertextual modes of articulating the uniqueness of language, especially Telugu language: Appakavi's confident and authoritative model of grammar, Sūrana's inventive narrative of language in its life-creating and consciousness-creating aspects, and the *cāṭu* metalinguistic commentary on the literary corpus and on the poet's potentially transformative role. Central to all these modes is the assertion of an essential link between poetry and grammar. In the vision of the seventeenth-century authors, the purpose of grammar is not to tell people in general how to use language (or to describe such usage empirically, as in the early Pāṇinian school) but to help *poets* use language. For it is poetic usage, with its particular expressive and active, indeed magical, powers, that is language at its most real.

THE END OF CLASSICAL FORMS

This anthology closes with the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Muddupaḷani and Tyāgarāja), but the genres and forms of the high-

medieval period remained active and creative through the whole of the nineteenth century and even into the early decades of the twentieth. The rich world of nineteenth-century Telugu poetry is still largely unexplored. Purāṇic composition, *kāvya, śatakas, padam*s (and the allied, shorter *jāvaḷis*), metaphysical texts, a new Christian literature in Telugu[73]—all constitute a wide-ranging literary ecology, continuous with the past but also responding to rapidly changing conditions. Certain forms even reached a new level of creative intensity under the impact, or threat, of the emerging print-culture—for example, the domain of oral improvisation and pyrotechnic memory displays (*śatâvadhāna*), as exemplified by the so-called Tirupati Kavulu (Divākarla Tirupati Śāstri and Cĕḷḷapiḷḷa Veṅkaṭa Śāstri).[74] By the end of the century, borrowed European forms—the novel, romantic poetry (the so-called *bhāva-kavitvamu*), modern plays, and short stories—began to appear, as the literary elite came under the influence of modern English education, thereby also distancing themselves from traditional learning.

The classical tradition had a powerful final flourish in the work of one of the greatest of Telugu poets, Visvanatha Satyanarayana (1895–1976). No one had a deeper understanding of the cultural transformation that Andhra was undergoing through colonial modernization. And like his great predecessors Kṛṣṇadevarāya and Pĕddana, Visvanātha combined, in penetrating and lyrical expression, the three components of vast erudition, meticulous realistic observation, and the ability to create an entirely imagined world.[75] He composed in both modern and traditional forms, in complex modes; his novels and novellas incorporate traditional structures, and his classical genres include a modern sensibility. Among his outstanding works are a novel of Tolstoyan scope, *Veyi paḍagalu* ("A Thousand Hoods"), and a verse *Rāmayaṇa* in six volumes, the *Śrīmad-rāmāyaṇa-kalpa-vṛkṣamu.* The latter work is of a magnitude and complexity on a par with the finest works of the classical authors. Despite this achievement, Visvanatha remains the most misunderstood of all Telugu writers, since the literary establishment has moved into a modern critical mode largely incapable of addressing his organic and innovative genius.

To conclude this introduction, we would like to give one short example of Visvanatha's style, a taste of the unique richness that appeared at the moment of the tradition's passing. Here is a verse from the first book of his *Śrīmad-rāmāyaṇa-kalpa-vṛkṣamu,* from the passage describing Ahalyā's liaison with Indra, king of the gods.[76] Indra has fallen in love with this woman,

73. E.g., the *Vedânta-rasâyanamu* of Maṅgalagiri Ānanda-kavi (ca. 1800).

74. See discussion in the afterword to Narayana Rao and Shulman, *A Poem at the Right Moment.*

75. See discussion of *Āmukta-mālyada* on pp. 40–43.

76. See selection from *Ahalyā-sankrandanamu* on pp. 278–91.

the wife of the sage Gautama; after a thousand years of longing, he approaches her one evening and is told by his beloved that the time is not right: "Has the cock crowed? (*koḍi kusĕnĕ*)," she asks. Indra takes the hint and spends the whole night tossing and turning in agony, waiting for the cock to crow at dawn:

> *niśi niśiy ĕllan indrunaku nīla-saroruha-locanā-vaco-niśita-manojña-bhāva-vipaṇī-kṛta-dhīkunakun manonugā-viśada-tanu-samârdra-viniveśana-darśana-dhī-jharī-saha-sra-śakalitâkṣi-goḷunaku sāgiyu sāgadu koḍi kūyadun*
>
> The night seemed endless. Indra's mind
> went mad like a marketplace, resounding
> with the words of the dark-eyed woman,
> sharp and seductive. Images
> of her limpid body—yielding, wet,
> flowing, enfolding—came like torrents,
> shattering his eyeballs into a thousand pieces
> from within. "Time moves but doesn't move.
> The cock won't crow."[77]

Probably no translation can begin to reproduce the power of Visvanatha's unprecedented Sanskrit compounds, bursting the seams of the Telugu syntax of the poem. These ancient words, yoked together in a relentless rush towards unthinkable climax, are forced to present wholly modern meanings, a consciousness that is exploded and fragmented by desire and memory. Nowhere in the medieval culture does Indra appear with this degree of tormented subjectivity, his mind torn to shreds by fantasy, pointedly described and effectively embodied in the shattering combination of words: *manonugā-viśada-tanū-samârdra-viniveśana-darśana-dhī-jharī-sahasra-śakalitâkṣi-goḷunaku.* Each of the units of this compound somehow stands alone, despite the supposition of syntactical unity; it is like a series of blows, each in a different place, mimicking the overwhelming visual attacks upon the nerve endings of the eyeballs: "Images of her limpid body—yielding, wet, / flowing, enfolding—came in torrents, / shattering his eyeballs into a thousand pieces / from within." This compound follows upon an earlier, softer one, in which Ahalya's provocative sentence has begun to echo in Indra's mind. At first, these words and their associated images are beautiful, but as they echo unendingly, obsessively, in his mind, they turn it into a chaotic marketplace; the next stage is the destructive torrent. Compounds like these, combining unusual depictions with totally unfamiliar forms (such as *vipaṇī-kṛta,* the mind "turned into a marketplace," or the nominals strung help-

77. Visvanatha, *Śrīmad-rāmāyaṇa-kalpa-vṛkṣamu* (Vijayavada: Viswanadha Publications, 1992), 1.3.524.

lessly together in the third line: *tanū-samârdra-viniveśana-darśana-dhī . . .*), puzzled the traditional pandits in Andhra, who dismissed Visvanatha in despair. The modernists, on the other hand, were unable to decipher verses like these even on the overt lexical level, which they found arcane; they therefore treated this poet as an anachronism. And yet Visvanatha's compelling presence, however misunderstood, could not be overlooked: violent storms swirled around his works for most of his life and even after his death. In view of the powerful modernity of this poet, we have not included him in this anthology.[78]

As one reads through the following collection, it is good to bear in mind that the classical tradition was never monolithic; even when new genres or modes became prominent, revolutionizing the previous literary ecology, they never dominated to the exclusion of other, previous forms. Thus we see Nannaya's *purāṇic* mode continuing almost into the twentieth century, though *kāvya-prabandha* becomes central to literary experience from Śrīnātha onwards. So-called "minor" or "marginal" genres, like *śataka,* continued to generate new works alongside highly visible, more elaborate or prestigious genres. To no small extent, this statement applies even today, after more than a century of modernist poetry shaped by the influence of an international "print culture." The Telugu tradition is one of enormous heterogeneity, with highly original impulses continuously embodying themselves in unexpected forms, often from the most remote and localized corners of the cultural universe. Even our tentative attempts at periodization and the description of a developmental sequence may hide deeper continuities. A similar statement can be made about categorical distinctions: court poets may not have needed anything approaching our image of a major royal court, and temple poets did not always belong to a major temple. Still, the Telugu literary sources consistently reveal the workings of an autonomous literary universe characterized by its own dynamics and by a fascination with certain recurrent themes. We have tried in the following pages to allow this tradition to sing in English in its many modes and forms and, insofar as English can allow this, its diverse and startling textures.

78. We are working on a cultural biography of Satyanarayana.

ONE

Nannaya

Early to middle eleventh century

Nannaya (also Nannayya, Nannayabhaṭṭu, Nannapārya) is the first Telugu poet whose works have survived. The tradition attributes to him not only the early books of the Telugu *Mahābhārata* but also the first Telugu grammar (in Sanskrit), *Āndhra-śabda-cintāmaṇi.* The first poet is thus, by definition, the first grammarian—*vāg-anuśāsanuḍu,* "legislator of language"—as well. The phrase, rooted in the later literary tradition, imitates one of Nannaya's: he refers to himself as *viṗula-śabda-śāsanuḍu,* "an authority on language"; the implication is one of control and power over words. The attribution of grammatical *sūtras* to Nannaya is, however, unlikely in the extreme.

By his own description, Nannaya was a *kula-brāhmaṇa,* "family guru," of the Eastern Chāḷukya king Rājarājanarenda, who ruled from Rajahmundry in the Godavari Delta (1018–1061). In the preface to his *Mahābhārata,* Nannaya tells us that this king commissioned the work, the foundational text of classical Telugu literature. Rājarājanarendra's rule was unstable; he was constantly embroiled in conflict with his half-brother Vijayâditya, the son of his father's Telugu wife (Rājarājanarenda was himself the son of a Tamil wife, Kundavai). It is not impossible that the factor motivating this Tamil king to patronize a Telugu work was his wish to make himself more popular among his Telugu-speaking subjects.

Nannaya completed only the first two and a half books of the *Mahābhārata* (up to 3.4.1422). His final verse is a lyrical description of an autumnal moment in the forest:

> *śārada-rātrul′ ujjvala-lasattara-tāraka-hāra-paṅktulan*
> *c̱ārutarambul′ ayyĕ vikasan-nava-kairava-gandha-bandhuro-*
> *dāra-samīra-saurabhamu dālci sudhāṃśu-vikīryamāṇa-kar-*
> *pūra-parāga-pāṇḍu-ruci-pūramulan c̱aripūritambulai.*

Autumn nights under the glowing canopy of stars,
dense with the wind-borne fragrance
of unfolding water lilies,
flooded with light white as camphor
flowing down from the moon . . .[1]

But there is an alternate, and better, reading for the concluding line: *pūramul′ ambara-pūritambulai,*

flooded with light white as camphor
flowing down from the moon,
and filled with sky.

The oral *cāṭu* tradition naturally prefers (and perhaps even created) this latter reading, which also allows for a pregnant pun: dividing the words differently, we get *-para-pūritambulai,* "completed by others." This, says the tradition, is evidence that Nannaya knew that this verse was his last and that his work would be completed by others.

A collaborator, Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭu, is mentioned by Nannaya in his preface. There is an inscription of 1051, composed by Nannaya himself, in which the king donates the village of Nandampūḍi to this Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭu.[2]

Nannaya's style, combining long Sanskrit compounds and Dravidian-based Telugu words and adapting a variety of Sanskrit and regional meters to his narrative purpose, became the paradigm for classical poetry in Telugu in all subsequent centuries. His mellifluous textures have no precedent in Telugu; he is always lyrical, laconic, and precise. In this sense, the traditional vision of Nannaya as the original maker of literature is fully justified.

ENTERING THE *MAHĀBHĀRATA*[3]

Śrī, Vāṇī, Girijā: three goddesses
forever inhabit chest, face, and body
of three gods who hold the world on course
without a break, wherever
female joins with male.

In these three males, whom the gods adore,
the three Vedas have taken form:
Puruṣottama, the Highest Male,
Ambuja-bhava, Lotus-Born,
and Black-Throat, Śrī-kandhara.

1. Nannaya, *Āndhra-mahābhāratamu* (Hyderabad: Andhra Pradesh Sahitya Akademi, 1970), 3.4.1422.

2. See K. Venkatanarayanaravu, *Āndhra vāṅmaya caritra saṅgrahamu* (Madras: Vavilla Ramasvamisastrulu, 1936; reprinted 1967), 43.

3. 1.1.1–32.

Let goodness come
from them
for you.[4]

This is praise for the lords who protect the whole universe, the very first, Hari, Hara, and Hiraṇya-garbha, husbands to Padma, Uma, and Vāṇi.[5] Their blessing has sustained the brilliant and ever-expanding kingdom of Rājarājanarendra. All his enemies have been subdued by the strength of his arm; he is like an ocean rich with gems, the manifold virtues sung all over this world.

Ravishing as the moon, he alone adorns the class of kings,
outshines the splendor of other rulers; a true warrior,
he illumines all worlds like pure moonlight on an autumn night.
He, Rājamahendra, has put his enemies to rest
with his indomitable arm—a honed sword—
as a shower of rain settles dust.[6]

Vimalāditya's son, lucid in thought, trained in the science of Kumāra,[7] a good Chāḷukya, luminous as the moon, finds peace in studying the ancient texts.[8]

Rising like the sun, he dispels the dense fog,
natural to this Iron Age,
of vicious evil. His rule
brings joy to his people like eternal springtime;
in the heart of this Chāḷukya who *is* Desire,
compassion flows into what is right.

He sustains anyone who comes to him for help.
Endlessly playful, he values the vast efforts scholars must make.
His joy is in giving, and his greatness lies
in watching over the ancient order of place and time.[9]
He supports all the worlds, like the First Kings.[10]
His story has no stain.

4. This first verse of invocation is entirely in Sanskrit, in a subtly musical texture uniquely characteristic of Nannaya.

5. A dangling nonfinite verb, *stutiyiñci,* ends this sentence, implying that the poet is the subject.

6. An untranslatable pun hinges on *dhārā,* both the blade of a sword and a flood of water.

7. We are unable to identify this *kumāra-vidyā.* Kumāra is, however, one of the primary teachers of traditional erudition in the south Indian (Tamil) sources.

8. *Āgamas.*

9. *Varṇâśrama-dharma.*

10. A Jaina concept? But cf. Dandin, *Kāvyâdarśa* ed. O. Böhtlingk (Leipzig: H. Haessel, 1890), 1.4.

Happily he raises his subjects like children.
Happily he holds down the kings of other lands,
and takes their taxes.
If any king refuses to give, he subdues him by force.
His command encompasses every corner.
He takes care of Brahmins, and shelters anyone in fear.

He gives whole villages to the highest born,
maintains temple lands in all their richness.
Firm in the path of Manu, this Viṣṇuvardhana is his family's pride.

If the earth is a beautiful woman enveloped by all the seas, then Veṅgi[11] is her necklace, and the central stone in that necklace is the royal city, Rājamahendrapuram.[12] One day the king was holding court there, in his enchanting palace where all the world's wealth resides, as if he were the king of the gods, vibrant with joy and the unlimited goodness that comes with kingship. Serving him were his ministers and priests, generals and policemen, ushers, chief ministers, an infinity of lesser kings, and lovely women; also specialists in grammar who had reached the end of the endless study of words; masters of ancient lore, beginning with *Bhārata* and *Rāmayaṇa* and many other *purāṇas;*[13] great poets skilled in inventing new ways of uttering poetic speech, soft and delicious; penetrating logicians who had immersed themselves in all kinds of reasoning; and other gifted people. Sitting at his ease in this atmosphere of learned conversation, he was enjoying his favorite stories. That was when he looked at Nannapārya—

his family's Brahmin, devoted to them,
given to sacrifice and prayer.
He was an authority on language,
versed in Veda but also delighting in various *purāṇas,*
Brahmâṇḍa and others;
a worthy member of the Āpastamba line
and the Mudgala lineage.
His character was known to be blameless,
and he knew the ways of the world.
He was famous for composing in both languages,[14]
deservedly ranked as brilliant,

11. Vengi is a general name for the Krishna-Godavari Delta, the heartland of the Eastern Chāḷukya rule.

12. Present-day Rajahmundry.

13. For Nannaya, the two "epics" are included in the class of *purāṇas,* "ancient knowledge."

14. Sanskrit and Telugu.

always truthful, wise as the teacher of the gods,[15]
a good man.

The illustrious Chāḷukya king, supremely knowledgeable in *dharma,*
gently said:

"I've listened to many ancient books with a stainless heart.
I've learned the ways kings must rule, and people live.
I've watched many surpassing plays, read eloquent poems vibrant with
meaning.
I've set my heart on temple texts that speak of God.

Nonetheless, ceaselessly I desire to hear what the *Mahābhārata* seeks
to say.

Five things never fail me, always give me joy:
the intense pleasure that comes from satisfying the earthly gods;[16]
delight in listening to the *Bhārata;*
contemplating Śiva's feet, in continuous celebration;
unbounded desire to give;
and the constant company of good men.

Furthermore,
my lineage begins with the moon, and then proceeds
through Puru, Bharata, Kuru, and King Pāṇḍu.
The stories of Pāṇḍu's famous sons, virtuous and beyond blame
are ever close to my heart.

You could give a hundred dark cows, with golden horns and hooves,
to the most learned Vedic Brahmins: listening to *Mahābhārata*
is as good as that. My mind inclines day and night
to those stories.

With all your learning, please compose in Tenugu
a book that makes clear
what the celebrated Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana spoke,
the proven meaning bound to the *Mahābhārata* text.

Those who hear *Mahābhārata* in many languages,
in many styles,
from many tellers,
always wanting these stories,
all the rewards of many offerings will forever
be theirs."

15. Bṛhaspati.
16. Brahmins.

When the poet heard this command of the king, he replied:

"Counting the infinite canopy of stars,
reaching the ultimate end of all Vedic knowledge,
swimming by strength of mind
through the expanse of words
and meanings, deep as an impassable sea,
that are *Mahābhārata*—
are such things possible
even for the God who created us?

Yet, my lord, by your command and with the support of the learned scholars, in so far as I am able, I will compose this poem."

He prayed to the gods, Hari, Hara, Aja, Gaṇeśa,
Sūrya, Skanda, the Mothers,
Sarasvati, Pārvati, and others.
He thought, with devotion, of the great Vālmīki, our teacher,
who withstood the hardships of inner discipline[17] and created,
like God Brahmā himself, the art of making poems.[18]

Then he worshiped Vyāsa, Parāśara's son,
great in fame among the sages,
who drove away the black distortions of ignorance
with the burning words of his *Mahābhārata*
and opened up scholars' minds
just as sunrise makes darkness retreat
and the lotus unfold.

There are assemblies where a subtle fragrance of wisdom
pervades the air as in pools of perfect lotus flowers,
accessible to all, and the good lives those scholars lead
purify and please like flowing water:
joyfully he praised them all.[19]

Like Nārāyaṇa,[20] who stayed with Arjuna through the terrible *Mahābhārata* war, Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭu of the Vanasa Brahmins,

17. *Tapas.*

18. Following the suggestion of Ravva Śrīhari, we read *guru* and *padya-vidyakun ādyun* as separate epithets. It is also possible to read *guru-padya-vidyakkun ādyun,* "(who created . . .) the art of making long poems."

19. We have no evidence for assemblies of scholars of this sort, unless Nannaya is here carrying on an image taken from the southern (Tamil) tradition—the legend of the Caṅkam academies.

20. Kṛṣṇa.

Nannaya's classmate and close friend, learned in literature,
worked with him at this long task.

For the good of the world, Nannaya became absorbed
in composing in Tenungu the *Mahābhārata* collection.
Steeped in wisdom, his words
glow with multiple meanings: poets with penetrating minds
follow the lively narrative through to its inner purpose,
while others give themselves to the harmony of sounds.

Those who understand the order of things
think it is a book about order.
Metaphysicians call it Vedânta.
Counselors read it as a book about conduct.
Poets read it as a poem.
Grammarians find here usages for every rule.
Narrators of the past see it as ancient record.
Mythologists know it to be a rich collection of myth.
Vyāsa, the first sage, who knew the meaning of all the Vedas,
Parāśara's son, equal to Lord Viṣṇ, made the *Mahābhārata*
a universal text.

UDAṄKA AND THE SNAKES[21]

There was this Udaṅka, a student of Paila's, as good as Brahmā himself, who could wash away evil with his inner discipline as water removes mud—a fearless man. In his guru's house he served his elders and achieved knowledge through single-minded concentration and, through his teacher's kindness, the eight superskills.[22] To please his teacher, in accordance with a request from the teacher's wife, he undertook to bring the earrings of King Pauṣya's queen. He was walking alone through the wilderness when he saw a striking man riding a huge bull; the man ordered him to eat the bull's dung. Passing this test, Udaṅka was blessed by the man and rapidly went on to see Pauṣya. He greeted the king and was honored by him. He said:

"I came here as a suppliant for the sake of my teacher.
Punisher of enemies, give me, now, the earrings of your queen,
so that my mission can be fulfilled."

21. 1.1.91–126.

22. The set of Yogic *siddhis,* beginning with *animan* (mentioned in Nannaya's text), the ability to make oneself as small as an atom, etc.

Pauṣya was overjoyed at this opportunity of giving something to so worthy a recipient and said: "As it happens, my wife is just about to put on those earrings. Go take them from her in my name." Udaṅka went to the inner chambers but could not find the queen anywhere. Returning to the king, he said: "Your queen is nowhere to be seen. You go bring the earrings for me."

Pauṣya said: "Your presence purifies the three worlds.
No one could say anything against you.
How could *I* call you unclean? But my chaste
and blameless queen cannot be seen
by one impure."

When he heard this, Udaṅka thought: "It must be because I ate that cow dung and became impure. What else could explain the fact that so devoted a wife escapes my vision?" So he faced east and washed his hands and feet and mouth with water, took a ritual sip, and, at Pauṣya's urging, again approached the queen. This time she greeted the sage and offered him her earrings:

"Takṣaka, king of snakes, is after these earrings.
He's impenetrable, and he's tricky.
Guard them well from him
as you go now, Brahmin brilliant as the sun."

Udaṅka promised to do so, and took his leave. As he was going, Pauṣya invited him: "You're a guest in my house. Eat something before you go." Udaṅka agreed. But as he was eating, he was disgusted to find a hair in the rice. Angry, he cursed the king: "You served me unclean food without examining it. Therefore, go blind." Pauṣya gave him a counter-curse: "Since you have cursed me for a minor omission, you will never have a son." Udaṅka said: "I cannot bear to be without a son. Take back your curse." Pauṣya replied:

"A full heart is like butter freshly churned.
Speech cuts, adamantine and sharp.
So it goes for Brahmins. For kings,
the opposite is true. So a Brahmin can,
but a king can never,
take back a curse, even if appeased.

So I am unable to do so. But please reverse *your* curse." Udaṅka said: "In that case, you will soon be released from my curse." And he left. He was thinking happily that he had got the earrings to give to his teacher's wife. In front of him he saw a pool. Putting down the earrings in a clean place,

he was sipping the water when Takṣaka, who had been following him closely, took them in the guise of a naked man and fled. Udaṅka pursued him.

The king of snakes abandoned that naked guise
without abandoning the earrings. Visible
in his true form, he slithered into the underworld
through a hole in the earth.

Udaṅka ran right behind him into the serpents' domain. He praised the great snakes:

"Sustaining on his thousand hoods
the dense burden of the earth,
all forests and oceans and rooted mountains
and rushing rivers and lakes, the Snake
called Infinite softly bears the unbearable body
of the god who sleeps on water.
Won't he make an end to whatever
was badly done, and be kind to me?

Through his inner power, he protects all snakes
from the torments of the antigods.
A great hero, he graces the body of the god
married to the Mountain's daughter,[23]
the one all gods and their enemies serve,
crowned heads bowing at his feet.
Won't Vāsuki be kind to me?

They wander among the worlds of gods and humans.
A furious power fuses their energy and their rage.
With burning venom they consume their foes in every world.
Won't those honorable and dreadful snakes
of Airāvata's clan be kind to me?

The wild Takṣaka roams at will
together with Aśvasena through the thickets
of the rooted mountains, the open spaces,
and the Kuru land. Won't this stubborn, overpowering king
of those creatures who hear with their eyes[24]
be kind to me?"

23. Śiva, married to Pārvatī.
24. *Īkṣaṇa-śrotra:* snakes are thought to use their eyes for ears.

After he had sung to the clans of snakes in this way, he saw two women weaving a fabric with threads black and white, six young men turning a twelve-spoked wheel, and a striking man astride a huge horse. Again he sang with deep concentration, verses rich in meaning. The striking man was pleased and said:

"You utter truth, and my heart is happy
with unerring praise. Tell me what it is
you want and I will do that
for you."

Udaṅka was very glad: "Please give me power over all these serpent clans." Said the man: "In that case, blow into the ear of this horse."[25] Udaṅka obeyed, and at once

flames emerging from all the orifices of the horse
filled every space in every house in the netherworld,
and the snakes were terrified. The heart of their king
burst open in a moment more shattering than the end of time,
when the submarine mare spits out an all-consuming fire.

In his terror, Takṣaka brought the earrings back
and gave them to Udaṅka, who, he feared,
might be able, like Śiva, to burn the world
with his Brahmin anger.

Udaṅka, after wreaking havoc in the world of the snakes and thus getting back the earrings from Takṣaka, thought to himself:

"My teacher's wife told me to bring these earrings within four days. Today is the day she has to wear them. Can I get there in time? How do I get out of this house of snakes? If I fail to go there today, this enormous effort will have been wasted." The striking man saw how worried he was, and said: "Mount this horse and go, for he is faster than thought, faster than wind."

Udaṅka followed this command. The very moment he mounted the horse he was in his teacher's house. There the wife had taken her bath and put on new clothes; she was waiting to put on the earrings, hoping Udaṅka would arrive. Right then she saw him. Happily, she put on those diamond earrings, worshiped the Brahmins, and completed the ritual she had vowed to perform.

So Udaṅka had carried out his teacher's mission. His teacher looked at him and said:

25. Note that in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata,* Udaṅka is asked to blow into the horse's anus.

"Pauṣya's city is right around the corner
from here, but you seem to have traveled
a very long way. You have immense, pure
inner strength. So why did you take
so many days?"

Udaṅka replied: "You're right, there was no need to tarry so long. But I had no choice—because of Takṣaka, the vicious snake, who put obstacles in my way. Listen. Right after leaving you, I saw a striking, blazing man riding a huge bull. He ordered me to eat the bull's dung. Then I went on and took the earrings from Pauṣya's queen. On my way back, they were stolen by Takṣaka. I followed him into the netherworld, where I sang praises to all the great snakes. There I saw two women weaving a fabric with threads black and white, six young men turning a twelve-spoked wheel, and a striking man astride a huge horse. Through his blessing I got the earrings, and at his command I mounted the horse and came here. Tell me what all this means." The teacher said:

"That man is Indra. The bull is Airāvata. The dung you ate is the essence of immortality. The two women you saw in the snakes' domain are Dhāta and Vidhāta, who propose and dispose. The fabric they were weaving with threads black and white is day and night. The twelve-spoked wheel is the year with its twelve months. The six young men are the six seasons. The horse is Fire. The man is Parjanya, lord of rain, a friend of Indra's. Sage that you are, once you saw Indra and ate the essence, you were able to achieve what you wanted.

You gave us a pleasing gift, and,
destroyer of enemies, you will reap the fruit.
When someone is attentive to his teacher's needs,
vast rewards will be his.

My heart is happy because of you. You are now free from your debt to your teacher. Go your way." So with his teacher's permission, Udaṅka gave himself to inner discipline for a long time. He was thinking about taking revenge for the harm Takṣaka had done him. One day he went to King Janamejaya and said:

"Janamejaya, ruler of men, your words
are measured, wise, and true. I was on my way
to serve my revered teacher, and Takṣaka knew.
With a mind bent on deception, for no apparent reason,
he caused me harm, for his whole nature
is deformed, and he is empty of any sense
of who he is, or others are.

What is more,

your father Parikṣit was a good man,
peaceful, given to rituals and charity,
devoted to the Bhārata clan. He was just like
Arjuna; he cared for everyone in his kingdom.
That same wretched snake killed him,
sent him down to the world of Death,
biting him with his burning venom
that no one could survive.

With no qualms at all, he did me a dark disservice,
assuming I was only a lonely Brahmin.
Now you should turn him and all the snakes
to ashes, in a sacrifice of serpents performed
by many Brahmins, totally consuming them
in furious flame.

If one person is bad, his whole family will be blamed.
There's nothing unusual about that.
So, because of that despicable Takṣaka,
you should wipe out all the snake-clans
by hurling them into the fire.
Use your wisdom, let Brahmins
perform this rite for you."

That is how Udaṅka planted the idea of a serpent sacrifice in Janamejaya's mind.

TWO

Nannĕcoḍa

Twelfth century?

The discovery by Manavalli Ramakrishnakavi, at the turn of the century, of Nannĕcoḍa's *Kumāra-sambhavamu* set off a literary storm. Ramakrishnakavi, who edited the manuscript and published the first seven cantos in 1909, made the shocking claim that Nannĕcoḍa was earlier even than Nannaya. Unfortunately, there is no hard empirical evidence to determine this poet's date. He tells us in his preface that he was ruler of a small area called Ŏrayūru (unidentified). That is all we know about one of the pioneers of Telugu poetic style. His book seems to have disappeared from the horizon of literary discourse already in medieval times; later poets never mention him.

One verse of his preface suggests indirectly that he knew Nannaya's work:

> Earlier, there was poetry in Sanskrit, called *mārga.*
> The Chāḷukya kings and many others caused poetry to be born
> in Telugu and fixed it in place, as *dési,* in the Andhra land.

Although neither Nannaya nor Rājarājanarendra are named explicitly, it is not unlikely that Nannĕcoḍa is referring to them, and to the birth of Telugu poetry connected to these names. He refers to no other Telugu poet, but he clearly has a conception of a regional *dési* tradition evolving in Telugu, in contrast with Sanskrit.

What can be said is that the texture of his composition points to an early date. There is an archaic quality to his verses, and also a freshness of perception or understanding—as if one were encountering a highly individual reworking of classical Śaiva narrative, perhaps drawn from sources now lost to us (for example, Nannĕcoḍa mentions in his preface a Sanskrit *Kumārasambhava* composed by Udbhaṭa, which has not survived). This unusual vision is also apparent in the metapoetic statement he makes in his introduction, translated below. Much of this statement remains opaque to us, including

the cryptic concepts of *vastu-kavita* and *jānu-tĕnugu,* but there is the sense of a highly original approach to the meaning and purpose of poetry.

The second selection describes the dialogue between Manmatha, god of desire, and his wife Rati, after Manmatha has accepted a suicide mission from Indra to attack the great god Śiva with his arrows of love. This passage has no precedent in Kālidāsa's famous *kāvya.* (It may follow Udbhaṭa's lost poem on this theme, since Nannĕcoḍa praises Udbhaṭa in 1.21.) The selection reveals both the poet's pointed insight into the human dimension of the classical story and his deft formulation of the characters' inner feelings.

ON POETRY IN TELUGU[1]

When poets begin their works,
they celebrate Vālmīki,
father to all poets, a gold mine of poems,
who first made poetry flower.

They say about Vyāsa
that it's not enough to praise him
for composing Vedânta, Mahābhārata, and Purāṇas.
He put the Vedas in order, something the Creator
could not do.

In a world that had lost Vālmīki and Vyāsa,
Kālidāsa, radiant in mind, assumed the throne of poetry
and made all other poets his slaves.

Bhāravi was like the sun:
he climbed Mount Indrakīla
with his words
just as the sun reaches up to the peak
of the Morning Mountain
with its rays.

Udbhaṭa composed a *Kumāra-sambhava*
on the theme of Śiva's play
and pleased the god with this poem,
which is the whole of figuration
with *kāvya* deep inside.[2]

1. Nannĕcoḍa, *Kumāra-sambhavamu* (Madras: Vavilla Ramasvamisastrulu and Sons, 1972), 1.17–33, 35–39, 41.

2. This work has been lost.

Another great poet was Bāṇa, whose arms were cut off.[3]
Poetry brought them back
when he sang to Śiva, giver of boons.

Earlier, there was poetry in Sanskrit, called *mārga.*[4]
The Chāḷukya kings and many others caused poetry to be born
in Telugu and fixed it in place, as *deśi,* in the Andhra land.

As one who carries a lamp
tilts it close to the objects
he knows to be there,
those who know truth
turn their minds
toward well-made poems.

I reject all bad poets, who only gather defects.

For them, the *mārga* way[5] is a bad way,
and the *deśi* way is no way. Still, they can't give up.
These other poets are all wrong.
No need to mention them.

A bad poet can only ruin something good,
and he certainly can't turn a flaw to good effect
in his poems. A dog can overturn
a pile of pots, but can it stack them neatly?

Small minds cannot enjoy a good poem,
full of flavor. They run to cheap poetry,
like flies that pass by whole sugarcane
and swarm around the chewed-up pulp.

You can only learn about poetry
from one who knows. There's nothing to be gained
from one who doesn't. You need a touchstone,
not a limestone, to test gold.

But when ideas come together smoothly in good Tenugu
without any slack, and description achieves a style,
and there are layers of meaning, and the syllables
are soft and alive with sweetness, and the words

3. Apparently a different Bāṇa from the author of *Kādambarī* and *Harṣa-carita.*

4. See p. 24 in the Introduction for a discussion of this classical opposition: *mārga,* the "classical," and *deśi,* "regional."

5. *Mārga* literally means "a path."

sing to the ear and gently delight the mind,
and what is finest brings joy, and certain flashes
dazzle the eye while the poem glows like moonlight,
and the images are the very image of perfection,
and there is a brilliant flow of flavor,
and both *mārga* and *deśi* become the native idiom,
and figures truly transfigure, so that people of taste
love to listen and are enriched
by the fullness of meaning—
that is how poetry works, when crafted
by all real poets.

Good color, build, apparent softness:
they're all there in a poor image, but if you look inside
it's dead. That's what a bad poet makes.
Good color, build, softness,
inside and out: you find them
in a living woman,[6] and in good poems.

If you look for good lines in a real poem,
they're everywhere, in dense profusion.
That is poetry.[7] But if one goes on chattering
and, by chance, a few lines
come out well, like a blind man
stepping on a quail,
would you call that a poem?[8]

Skilled words, charming movements,
ornaments, luminous feelings, elevated thoughts,
the taste of life—connoisseurs find all these
in poetry, as in women.

An arrow shot by an archer
or a poem made by a poet
should cut through your heart,
jolting the head.
If it doesn't, it's no arrow,
it's no poem.

6. *Ratna-putrika* is a crux: A gem of a woman? A sculpted jewel? The compound is unique to Nannĕcoḍa. But the opposition seems to be between a lifeless image and a real, living person.

7. Reading (*pace* the modern commentators) *sat-kṛtiya kūrp′ agu: kūrpu* as composition, poetry.

8. *Andha-lāvuka-nyāya:* a blind man catches a quail by chance.

HOW TO MAKE GOD FALL IN LOVE[9]

[Indra, king of the gods, has commissioned Manmatha, "Desire," to disturb Śiva in his meditation and make him fall in love with the divine Uma, so that Śiva will produce through Uma a son to lead the gods in war against their enemies. Manmatha has accepted this dangerous mission.]

"This job is just right for me," Manmatha said to Indra. "I accept. Give me the betel."[10] Thus honored by the king of the gods, Manmatha took his leave and headed home, together with his friend, Spring. Meanwhile, at home,

Rati, his wife,[11] was ill at ease,
waiting for her husband to return.
Surprising evil omens were appearing.
Tremors shook her body, as if the antigods
had possessed her. She was sad and terrified.
Then she saw her husband's flag in the sky,
with a crocodile painted on it.

Bees buzzing, cuckoos cooing sweetly,
parrots singing joyful chants:
with a great flourish, Manmatha arrived,
eager to see his wife.

She looked at him and hid her inner sadness
with a smile. After the usual greetings,
she asked: "Indra summoned you for some
special purpose—what was that?"

She pressed him. He saw her feelings on her face. A little irritated, he replied, with a smile:

"You seem scared, though you're trying to hide it.
I can see in your movement
that you're masking fear.
Your lips are quivering. What is it that is
disturbing you? Tell me."

So she told him about the mysterious omens, some from the gods, some from the sky, some from the earth, and some from her own body. "Tell

9. Nannĕcoḍa, 4.54–76, 78–82.
10. The gift of betel nut and leaf seals a contract.
11. The name means "delight," especially sexual delight.

me what happened at Indra's court," she asked, looking very miserable. "Nothing special," he said. "He just asked me to disturb Śiva and Uma, and I said I would do it." When she heard this, Rati was shocked, her heart shaking, and she said:

"Maybe Indra doesn't care that Śiva is our family god,
but doesn't he know that the whole universe worships him?
It means nothing to him that Śiva is a great Yogi,
but what about the fact that he is the Lord of all the worlds?
Indra may not fear a god who cut off Brahmā's head,
but isn't he afraid of someone who put an end to Death?
His three eyes may not be frightening,
but still he is Rudra, the Doomsday fire.
Indra is sending you against that terrible god.
Will helping Indra do us any good? If you take on
the strongest, death is certain. Doesn't Indra
know this?

Indra has sent you off without further thought.
He's a king, after all. You are going
as his lieutenant. But are you a warrior?
Will Śiva be a pushover? You're hunting
a lion, and it will be a miracle if either you
or Indra survive.

All the women in heaven are in love with you.
Indra can't stand it. That's why he's sending you
to your death, on this pretext.

Those women don't look at him the way
they look at you. So Indra hates you
and wants you to die. Should you make it easy
for him by volunteering?

When the gods invited you for this mission,
you took it as an honor. They told you Śiva
would be an easy target, so you quickly
got ready to go. But you're risking your life.
You're not even afraid of this impossible task.
Viṣṇu and Lakṣmi[12] would hardly approve
of your arrogant talk.

12. Manmatha's parents.

If Śiva opens his third eye, for some reason or other,
the whole universe dies in an instant.
How can you attack someone so fierce?
Very well, go ahead: how big a fish
can a little fish eat?

Like somebody who chews up a brick
at the wink of an eye,
you're so full of yourself
you want to take on the gods.
Fighting with Rudra for no reason
is like a locust fighting fire."

While Rati was telling him about Śiva, and trying to discourage him, Manmatha looked at her and said:

"When I shoot my flower arrows, the hearts
of both Śiva and Uma will simply melt
and unite. Do you have any doubt?
I want to achieve this goal, never attempted before
in any world. Skilled archer that I am,
I will make their bodies one.

You know, by what you've seen and heard,
that nothing in all the worlds
can cross my command. Why are you
so afraid? Why make the god draped in snakes
into such a vicious enemy?"

Manmatha thought this should put an end to the argument, but Rati was still thinking about Śiva's power, and she said:

"His bow is the Mountain of Gold; yours
is made of sugarcane. His arrow is the deadly
Pāśupata. You shoot flowers that wilt at a touch.
He wrecks cities.[13] And you—you wreak havoc
in the hearts of men stranded far from their lovers.
However you look at it, you're as close to him
as a mosquito to an elephant.

Your soft arrows can't even penetrate
the hearts of those who worship Śiva,
let alone the god himself. Is it wise
to think of vanquishing the invincible?

13. The reference is to the Triple City of the antigods.

I'm a woman, I'm frail, but if I look at you
in anger, you start to shiver.
What makes you think you can withstand
the fire from Śiva's deadly eye?

Children chew it up and spit it out,
but still you rely on sugarcane
to make your bow.
Flowers that die when pressed into women's hair
you take for arrows.
The gentle breeze that can hardly move a tender bud
is your Chief Lieutenant,
and your elite units are manned by bees and parrots,
that any woman can shoo away.
Spring, burned up
at the touch of the mildest of summers,
is your ally. The spearhead in your attack
is a row of cuckoos, who are scared away by baby crows.
Armed like this, with such splendid troops,
you hope to move against the Fierce God?

Are you stronger than the Man-Lion, who got himself skinned?[14]
Are you stronger than the Creator, who lost one of his heads?[15]
Are you mightier than Death, who was burnt to cinders?[16]
Why pick a quarrel, for no reason, with the god
who destroys all?"

He listened, and replied: "Strength, valor, magical spells, schemes, meditations, mind control, and other such superhuman powers, however marvelous they may be, become soft under the influence of passion, like the moonstone when touched by moonbeams. Everyone knows this by experience.

When men who can crush an elephant to death
tightly hold them in their embrace,
women more tender than a flower
beg for more. Don't you know
the supreme power of passion?

If you want to know the reason:

14. Śiva, as *śarabha-mūrti,* overcame Viṣṇu as the Man-Lion.
15. Brahmā was beheaded by Śiva.
16. As Kālântaka, Śiva destroyed Yama, the god of death.

So long as living beings are either male or female
and have minds that feel,
that is enough—all of them
are controlled by Desire.
That's how the Creator made the world,
and He gave me this power."

Then he explained to her the supremacy of desire—the prime cause of the first creation—and convinced her. He was ready, now, to advance against God.

THREE

Pālkuriki Somanātha

Thirteenth century

The outstanding representative of the *dvipada* style, and as such the dominant voice in the counter-tradition competing with the *campū* style of Nannaya and his successors, Pālkuriki Somanātha also embodies the crystallization of a Vīraśaiva hagiographic corpus in Telugu, perhaps a century after the Vīraśaiva foundational poet Basava, whose story he tells in his *Basava-purāṇamu*.[1] His tradition is anti-Brahminic, anti-court, anti-temple; it is also closely associated with the so-called "left-hand" castes of artisans, merchants, and other groups not tied to the land. This milieu inherited the great wealth of Śaiva narrative from further south, in the Tamil country, and refashioned it radically. Thus, the story of Tirunāḷaippovār, embedded in the selection below, is known from the Tamil *Pĕriya purāṇam* of Cekkiḻār, who tells it in a "right-hand" (Velala) mode; according to Cekkiḻār, the Untouchable hero, intent on reaching the great temple of Cidambaram, is purified by fire outside the shrine. By the time this story has entered the Vīraśaiva Telugu stream, even the name of its Untouchable protagonist has been reconceived, apparently on the basis of a linguistic misunderstanding. Instead of "the one who wants to go [to Cidambaram] tomorrow," we now have "one who is going to the festival [*tirunāḷḷu*]." In addition, this story of an Untouchable is now part of a radically subversive set of stories highly antagonistic to the ordered society of the medieval south, with its well-defined castes, its rules of purity, and its hierarchically graded spaces.

This short selection is an embedded narrative in Somanātha's

1. See Velcheru Narayana Rao, trans. assisted by Gene H. Roghair, *Śiva's Warriors: The Basava Purāṇa of Pālkuriki Somanātha* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

Paṇḍitârādhya-caritramu, which tells the history of Vīraśaivism's other great "founder," Mallikârjuna Paṇḍitârādhya, the Brahmin teacher at Śrīsāilam who perfected the institutional infrastructure that allowed this new religion to expand into Andhra from its original base in the Karnataka region. We have translated the very fluid and versatile *dvipada* verse-form into prose; in the hands of Somanātha, *dvipada* changes rapidly from song to conversation, from fast-paced narration to hymns of praise, incorporating complex syntactic patterns in the ostensibly simple strings of couplets. No subsequent *dvipada* poet ever attempted anything like this expressive range. This poetic achievement, embodied in hagiographies of the two major figures of early Vīraśaivism as well as in a number of minor works such as the *Vṛṣâdhipa-śatakamu, Caturveda-sāramu,* and *Anubhava-sāramu,* is intrinsic to Somanātha's role as the great systematizer of Telugu Vīraśaivism. His poetic composition was not, however, limited to Telugu; in his shorter texts he included verses in Tamil, Kannada, Sanskrit, and Marathi, thus exemplifying the widespread multilingualism of this period.

THE BRAHMIN WIDOW AND THE UNTOUCHABLE GOD[2]

There was a woman called Sūrasāni of Poraṇḍla, a Brahmin village. Her husband died, but she went on serving the *jaṅgamas.*[3] The foolish Brahmins of the village went to the king and complained: "Lord, calamity has come to our village. This woman Sūramma was fine until recently, but now she has discarded all the rules of widowhood. Maybe she ate some of the crazy fruit.[4] Or she became confused and lost her senses. She smears her cheeks, her eyes, and her forehead with a thick layer of ashes; drapes her head, neck, ears, and wrists with *rudrâkṣa* beads. When Untouchable *jaṅgamas* turn up begging, she falls at their feet, washes their feet and drinks the water, feeds them and eats their leftovers. What is worse, she has polluted the whole village with these Mālas.[5] This village has become an Outcaste colony. Will you punish her if we find her entertaining Mālas at home?"

The king, angry, said, "Yes. Just catch her in the act." So the Brahmins lay in wait. One day:

2. Pālkuriki Somanātha, *Paṇḍitârādhya-caritramu* 1. *Sūrasāni katha,* ed. Cilukuri Narayana Rao. Andhra grantha mala 30 (Madras: Andhra Patrika Press, 1939) 114–61; abridged, 2nd ed. (Hyderabad: Telugu Visva-Vidyalayam, 1990) 29–41.

3. The Vīraśaiva devotees of Śiva.

4. *Unmĕtta kāya.*

5. Untouchables.

thick face, thick hands,
thin thighs, bones sticking out,
callused palms, carrying
raw leather, a knife in the left hand,
dirty feet, dirty body,
crooked forehead, crooked neck,
yellow teeth, all uneven,
a big belly, bent back,
bulging eyes, bushy eyebrows,
drooping ears, a thick nose,
stubby bowlegs,
crooked fingers, grimy fingernails,
red eyes, a forehead smeared with ashes,
stripes of ashes on his arms,
big *rudrâkṣa* and crystal beads,
beads of the sala tree,
cropped hair, a string around his neck,
a knife, a bundle of hides, and ropes
in the right hand, in the left—
the stick that was his badge:

Śiva came, as an Outcaste, announcing to the Brahmins, at a distance: "*Sĕmbali, sĕmbali*—don't touch me." He bowed to them, moving away. "Leather strings, anybody? Ropes, anybody?" Again and again, he walked the streets. At every house people called him, asked the price. He named a high price. Whenever he saw a devotee of Black Neck, he smiled at him and cried, "You are my refuge." He carried their sandals.

He pretended not to see the Brahmins lying in wait. He kept them on edge. Finally, he came to Sūrasāni's house. She saw him and came straight to him; she bowed to him; she hung his ropes and leather strings on a hook, put his knife down on the porch, stuck his stick into the eaves, washed his feet and sipped that water, took him inside and locked the door. Overjoyed, she seated him on a throne. She worshiped him, spread the banana leaf, and fed him a cooked meal.

Meanwhile, outside, the Brahmins were calling: "Sūramma! You've made this village a Māla colony for all these days. At last we have caught you. Where can you hide? Your sin has ripened. You'll pay for everything inside your own house." They pulled the doors together and padlocked them from outside. Leaving a few Brahmins at the door, on guard, and some all around the house, they yelled to one another, "Hey Yĕgĕnna, Hey Bhinna, Balabhadra, Mailāra, Mattĕna—we've won. Call the police[6]

6. *Talārulu.*

and the Brahmins." They called them all by name,[7] and they all came, together with the judges and the police. Then they called the king.

"What can we say, lord? Listen. Sūramma's penance has borne fruit. Is this how a woman should behave after her husband dies? What wonderful ways! Her devotion is complete, in all its limbs. This Mādiga[8] came through the streets, selling ropes at every door. When nobody was buying, he got tired and came to *her* house. She saw him, went to him, bowed to him, happily brought him home. You can see how she washed his feet. Just look where she put his stick, his knife; she hung his ropes on a hook. She didn't care if anyone was looking; she took him inside and closed the door. So we locked it from the outside and called for you."

Meanwhile, inside, Śiva was eating with gusto, belching loudly, slurping, chewing noisily, swallowing, sucking, and enjoying every sip and morsel. At last he took a cup of cold water, gargled with it, and spat it out; he licked his lips, washed his teeth with his finger, and spat one more time, loudly. It was all very crude. The Brahmins got up, as they said to the king: "You've heard it all, haven't you? This drunk is eating there, without fear. It doesn't bother him that this is a Brahmin village, full of Brahmin houses. He's not worried that people have come to catch him. He's not afraid of us, or of you. He doesn't seem to mind that he'll be punished. He thinks he's master of the house. This imposter just goes on eating. Maybe he decided to die after one good meal. And see this woman: no awareness of how bad she is, of what she's doing, ruining her character and losing caste. She's lost the respect that goes with widowhood, and with being a Brahmin. She didn't consider that her husband would lose his place with the ancestors. She's not afraid of the king. She fears no ridicule from her relatives. She's thrown our caste into an abyss of darkness. We've been hearing about this for days, and now we can see it plainly." Then, in anger: "Break down the walls! Break open the doors! Tear down the house from the roof! Smash the bolt! Dismantle the eaves! Jump inside! Bring both of them out! Beat them up! Burn them alive!"

She spoke up, without fear. "You yell, 'Untouchable, Untouchable!' Who's the Untouchable here? How can an Untouchable enter my house when even Brahmins like you cannot enter the home of a devotee? You don't seem to have eyes that can see. Where are the low-caste people in my house? In the home of a devotee, there is no one but Rudra—no one less than he. . . . God is in my house: see him, if you can." To teach them a lesson, she opened the door.

They went in. God, inside, became formless. "He's gone," they cried.

7. A long list of Brahmin names follows.

8. Outcaste leatherworkers from the left-hand segment of the social order, as suits the Vīraśaiva milieu in Andhra.

They hunted in all the crooks and crevices, under the bed, over the canopy, behind the pillars, inside the grain bin, behind the doors, in closets, beyond the images used in worship. To their amazement, they found no one. "We didn't see anybody scale the walls and escape," they said. "Did he make a hole in the roof? But there's no hole. We were watching the door—he couldn't have gone that way. He must be somewhere. Suppose you say he disappeared. How can a human being disappear? Let's ask her where she's hidden him."

"Stop all these games," they said to her. "Show us that idiot Mādiga. Where have you put him?" Looking at those bastard Brahmins, Sūramma spoke in anger.[9] "When a drama is performed in the theater and the players put on various guises, won't a wife in the audience recognize her husband? God takes many aberrant forms to test the hearts of his devotees. For their part, they will recognize him.

"I'll tell you a story. In the Dravida land there was a man named Tirunāḷḷappova,[10] who was working for a daily wage in a Brahmin's house. He worshiped the *liṅga* and took care of the *jaṅgamas*. He wanted to go to the festival[11] at Pĕrumattapuryūru.[12] But day after day passed, for twelve years, and each day he said, 'Tomorrow I will go.' Finally, luckily, one day he had to go there to perform *corvée* labor for the Brahmin. He was thrilled: at last he would get to see the city. He started early and, to begin his labor, he picked up a big load of grass. Suddenly, as if someone had turned a huge pot upside down, a downpour began. Somehow or other, he managed to get to the town, long after his companions had already arrived. Night fell. He stood all night in water up to his waist, leaning against a wall. Though he used the grass to cover his head, he was still soaked through. But he was thinking only about when he would see the god in his festival; in his joy, he stood still as a rock, until dawn.

"Meanwhile, Śiva went into the dream of his devotees and said, 'East-northeast of this town, at the corner where the outer wall of the temple meets the tower,[13] a man is standing in a flood of water, with a bundle of grass on his head. Grass is floating all around him; his belly is bloated, his sinews frozen, his body shivering. His lips are pale, his eyelids puffy, his tongue heavy, the joints of his fingers stiff. His feet are swollen, and the soles blistered: he is thoroughly soaked. I went to where he is, and I am

9. We omit the *sāma-vedi katha*.

10. Tamil Tirunāḷaippovār, "the one who will go tomorrow," but the Telugu name means "the one going to the festival." See Cekkiḻār, *Pĕriya purāṇam* (Koyamputtūr: Kovaittamiḻcaṅkam, 1937), 1041–77.

11. *Tirunāḷḷu*.

12. Pĕrumpaṟṟapuliyūr, i.e., Cidambaram.

13. *Gopura-prākāra-koṇambun'andu*.

there now—just like him. Go decorate an elephant and bring it there to take us into the city.' They woke up. In every street, people were reporting the same dream. The rain stopped; all the devotees gathered, brought the elephant, raised the laborer onto it, and led him to the temple. Quickly he entered the sanctum and disappeared. He merged into Śiva, Viṣṇu's lord.[14] How can you say he was an Untouchable?[15]

"If you look with the eyes of *karma,* the illusion of caste looks like *dharma.* If you see it with the eyes of Śiva's *dharma,* you'll see that caste is false *dharma.* That is the power of Śiva's devotees. But no more lectures. I'll teach you a lesson. You can't really see the true form of Śiva, but look anyway. Try your best." She removed the throne on which she had seated the god, and a *liṅga* appeared of its own accord, as if the root-mantra in her heart had taken external shape, or as if the joy of imagining Śiva had become solid, or as if her faith had turned into a rock. "Here is the beggar who ate in my house," she said. "He is Rudra. He is God."

They fell at her feet, begging forgiveness. "We idiots who study the Veda, morons who perform rituals—we are the Untouchables," they cried. They rolled in the dust at her feet. They danced with the Untouchable's stick that had been hung in the eaves. They vied with one another to put his sandals on their heads; they threw them into the sky, and caught them again. They danced, with slow rhythmic steps. Moved by the power of her devotion, they composed new poems and songs.

As for Sūrasāni, she went on living, with love for Śiva, just as before.

14. *Śrīpati-nātha.*

15. A series of embedded stories follows, all dealing with low-caste devotees.

FOUR

Tikkana

Thirteenth century

Nannaya's great successor, who completed most of the Telugu *Mahābhārata,* was Tikkana, minister to a small king called Manumasiddhi in Nĕllūru (present-day Nellore). We know the names of his parents, Annamâmba and Kŏmmanâmātya, and his title, Somayāji, which seems to reflect a ritual (Vedic sacrificial) role. He plays a major part in later literary tradition, such as in the *Pratāparuda caritramu* of Ekâmranātha and the *Siddheśvara caritramu* of Kāsĕ Sarvappa (17th century), where he appears as a deft negotiator and a relentless enemy of Buddhism and Jainism. He is said to have won a victory for his king—in effect to have reinstated him on his throne after Manumasiddhi had been driven away by his enemies, Akkana and Bayyana—by a personal mission to the Kākatīya king Gaṇapati Deva. His image is of an active, imaginative ideologue no less than a sophisticated and innovative poet.

Along with his parts of the *Mahābhārata,* Tikkana composed an *Uttararāmāyaṇamu,* popularly known as *Nirvacanottara-rāmāyaṇamu* because it contains no prose passages (*vacanam*); the book is dedicated to Manumasiddhi. His *Mahābhārata* is dedicated to the god Hariharañatha, a conjoined form of Viṣṇu and Śiva.

In his colophons, Tikkana calls himself *ubhaya-kavi-mitra,* "a friend of both schools of poetry." It is unclear what he means by this, but it is possible that the reference is to Śaiva and non-Śaiva streams, which in this context run parallel to *deśi* ("local, regional, popular") and *mārga* (elevated, Sanskritic, classical). Both his syntax and diction were strikingly Dravidian, and never emulated by his successors. Straddling the boundaries of oral/performative and written/monological composition, Tikkana stands alone in the whole history of Telugu literature, a figure of remarkable individual creativity.

The passage chosen for this anthology, from the fourth book of the

Mahābhārata, shows the poet engaged in elaborating a series of tableaux drawn, as it were, directly from observed life—the life of medieval Telugu village chiefs, with their clans, their intense family networks and rivalries, and their heroic values. The five Pāṇḍava brothers are hiding, in disguise, in the Rajasthani kingdom of Virāṭa, where the arrogant Kīcaka serves as military commander under the king. Kīcaka falls in love with Draupadi, the Pāṇḍavas' wife, and tries first to seduce, then to rape her. When Yudhiṣṭhira remains passive during this humiliating attack, she looks to the forthright, ferocious Bhīma to protect her. Tikkana paints this melodramatic situation with penetrating psychological insight and an ear attuned to the nuances of each individual voice.

THE SLAYING OF KĪCAKA[1]

The Pāṇḍavas were living, together with Draupadi, in Virāṭa City. They were a few days short of concluding one whole year.[2] One day the eldest Kīcaka,[3] Siṃhabala, the brother-in-law of the Matsya king and his commander-in-chief, was going to pay his respects to his older sister, Sudeṣṇa,[4] when he caught sight of Draupadi, who was standing closeby. Kīcaka was always enamored of appearances; he was himself decked in fine ornaments and rather flamboyant, and proud of his physical strength.

His mind could not contain
her arresting beauty, and his eyes
were transfixed—he could not tear them
from that woman. He stood there, stunned,
his heart trapped by lust, his pride in ruins.
His limbs lost all energy, and his courage
drained away.

His heart was like an animal caught in a noose
set by the hunter named Desire—and that noose
was her beauty. Siṃhabala was shaken.

1. Tikkana, *Āndhra-mahābhāratamu* (Hyderabad: Balasarasvati Book Depot, 1984). *Virāṭa-parvan,* 2.22–26, 33, 38, 40–45, 48–50, 53–63, 65–68, 72–82, 88–94, 96–103, 107–12, 116–17, 120–28, 140–44, 147–53, 164–78, 187, 227–32, 236, 242–72, 275–79, 290, 320–26, 328–46, 348–61.

2. The thirteenth year of their exile which, under the conditions of their wager, had to be spent incognito.

3. The Kīcakas are a family or clan, of whom this Kīcaka—Siṃhabala—is the most prominent.

4. The queen (wife of Matsya-rāja).

He thought to himself:

"Has any human being ever seen such loveliness?
Not only I—even Indra's son, Jayanta,[5]
would be entangled if he saw her.
Because of her, the rule of Passion
must pervade the world. Making love to that woman
would be the end result of all one's cumulating merit
from births immemorial."

"He's looking at me shamelessly," thought Pāñcāli,[6]
and, angry at heart, she started to perspire.
When she thought of the Creator's talent
for getting things wrong, she was amazed.
She started shivering, because no one was there
to help her. "There's no escape," she thought,
and her face turned pale.
But he—that despicable man—read the signs wrong,
like a fool. He was even happy, certain
she was showing nascent passion, as he himself
was flooded by lust.

Thus overtaken by Desire, Kīcaka, hoping to find out from his sister who this woman was, finally managed to turn his eyes away from her. He bowed to the queen and asked:

"This woman fragrant as the lotus—what family does she come from?
What's her story? What's her name? Who is her husband?
Where does she live, and how does she spend her day?
What task has brought her here? How deeply do you
care for her? Tell me this."

The queen saw at once that his heart was torn by desire. She tried to think of some way to turn his mind away. She pretended to ignore his questions, and spoke of other matters. But he, empty as he was, quickly went back to where proud Draupadi was standing and, pacing beside her, asked,

"Was there ever any woman on earth as beautiful as you?
Who is your father? Who is your husband? Tell me your name.
Your face is radiant as the moon."

5. A model of male beauty.
6. Draupadi.

She heard, but pretended not to hear. She stood still, without emotion. But he went on, in his fickle way:

"Why not open your eyes, alive with light, and look at me?
Couldn't you smile just a little, and double the charm of your delightful face?
You might say something in reply and reveal your pearl-like teeth.
Why not hold my hand and show your taste?"

He was staring at her, coming closer, hungry to hear her speak, trying to get hold of her hand with his, dying to show his passion. She was angry, but she controlled her deep sense of humiliation and calmed herself. "This man is filled with false pride. It's not good to be hasty. I have to extricate myself with some skill," she thought, and said:

"Can't you see I am in some distress? This body,
this sari, this repulsive appearance—to say that these
are arousing is utterly wrong.

Is it right for good people like you to talk like this?
Don't you have sisters too? Moreover, I am of low birth,
and a married woman. Can you approach one like me?"

He answered: "You yourself are the proof
that you are not lowborn. I can stand
the sin of loving another man's wife
better than I could bear the ongoing attack
of Desire."

Now she was angry, and knew how low he really was—
knew that unless he was threatened, he would never
soften and leave. So she said:

"Invincible, valiant, virile,
exquisitely equipped to destroy
any enemy blinded by pride
are my husbands, all five of them,
gandharvas with bodies of gods.
Listen, Kīcaka: they will easily
ruin your name and kill you.
Depend on that."

He replied: "Forget about your husbands.
There is no one in all three worlds
who can engage me in battle.
Take it from me, young lady."

Now she lost her patience and said, defiantly:

"Is it a good idea to try to pluck the fruits
from trees you can't reach, without thinking
whether you can do it or not? Have you never heard,
you idiot, of what happened to Rāvaṇa[7] and others like him,
their utter ruin?"

He could not see the wisdom of her words. Returning, burning with desire, to his sister, he showed her a pathetic face: he was sighing hot sighs, inflamed. But she paid no heed and made no attempt to console him. Hesitantly he said:

"My heart is stuck on that woman whose name I asked you about, and I'm in agony. Only you know what to do now. She has been with you all this time. Where did she go now?" Sudeṣṇa saw his frenzy and shook her head in disapproval.

"He's lost in love with the hairdresser,[8] and this will surely bring
disaster.
He certainly won't give up if I tell him to. My god, what can I do?

But I will try to dissuade him." So she said to him,

"They walk gracefully like geese, their toe rings chiming.
They toss the end of their saris from their fragrant bodies,
and toss it back. They sway like vines, they stand beside you,
showing off their beauty, their shining eyes enhancing
their white smile as they speak smoothly.
Their movements flow with desire,
and they excite you with their words.
So many women, like these, serve you out of love—
why go after this so ordinary body?"

He rejected her words, looked at her, and said:

"I'm certain of one thing. There's no one like her
in my service, nor in the court of heaven.
If you don't bring her to me by some device or other,
I will suffer the torments of overpowering desire."

Sudeṣṇa replied:

"She has five husbands, rich in strength and valor,
gandharvas—my heart shivers if I merely think of them.
Brother, why do you want her?"

7. Rāma's demonic enemy.
8. Draupadi disguised as *sairandhrī*.

If you follow a forbidden path, will you survive?
To stray from what is healthy, no matter how strong
the craving, is unwise. Listen to me,
curb your desire."

But he couldn't bear to hear her: his lust
was overpowering, so he said, aggressively,
to Sudeṣṇa:

"Woman, I'll tell you one thing. Everybody knows
that in this world, encircled by four oceans,
no one can stand up to me. Her husbands
will be shattered by the strength of my arms,
just as the mountains were shattered by Indra's
diamond weapon.[9]

Stop giving me sermons. Make me happy,
one way or the other. Put an end to the pain
that is burning me. If you want what is best for me,
stop telling me all this nonsense about being unwise.
Call that woman here."

Quickly he got up and threw himself at his sister's feet, all his misery showing on his face. Sudeṣṇa was taken aback, and thought:

"I will simply have to bear all the consequences, and bring
that woman to him. Nothing will sway him, no matter
what I say. This brute won't do what's right.
He will certainly die—if not by her husbands,
then through lethal desire."

She lifted up her brother and, as tears welled up
in her eyes, she said:

"Don't be upset. Is it a problem for me to bring that woman
to you? Don't worry, don't waste time here.
Go home.

I'll send her to your house during the daytime,
as if to fetch me liquor. Then take your pleasure."

Kīcaka heard and was happy. He went home, prepared sweet drinks and snacks, and made sure no one else was around. His infatuation with Pāñcāli was pressuring his mind. He began to fantasize, out of his inflated self, that she would crawl all over him as soon as she saw him.

9. Indra is said to have cut off the wings of the mountains with his *vajra*.

Meanwhile, Sudeṣṇa, pretending to be thirsty, sent for Draupadi and said:

"My mouth is dry. I want a drink, a good one. Kīcaka always has the best liquor in his home. Go at once and bring some: let's see how fast you can walk."

Draupadi's heart started pounding. She was sweating, and she was scared.
"What a crisis," she thought. "I can't say I won't go, and I can't just go. I need some skillful tactic to get me out of this."

Her mind swinging back and forth, she said to Sudeṣṇa:

"Leave me alone, send someone else for the liquor.
I always perform your service faithfully, in constant attendance,
intent on proper action that brings respect. This menial task,
fit for another kind of servant, is not for me.

I believed this house was flawless in its ways. Even in the absence
of my husbands, I have stayed here in comfort. Is it right for me
now to lose respect?

Can you send me to just anybody's house, to get just anything?
Didn't I make it clear, the very first day I came to your service,
that there were certain low tasks I wouldn't do?"

Sudeṣṇa knew it wasn't right, but she was thinking of her brother's pain.
In a friendly tone, she said,

"But I wanted it so badly—my very favorite drink.
I didn't want to send some lowly servant.
But you are making a big issue of it, as if
I had asked something improper. You're all in agony.
Is this how a friend helps a friend?

It's not a stranger's house, after all.
Everybody knows you there. I'm always telling everyone
how honorable you are, from the day I first saw you."

And she went on in this vein, entreating her, and Draupadi saw that there was no way to struggle against her. She said, her mind still hesitant:

"I will go and perform this task you want from me so badly."
The queen was pleased, and gave her a golden vessel for the liquor.

In some anguish, Draupadi headed for Kīcaka's house. Her ears
were still ringing with his words of harsh harrassment, and now
Sudeṣṇa had sent her on this unworthy errand—like burning
a person with a firebrand after he was struck by lightning.

Thinking of God protects one from all calamities, she knew, so she held Viṣṇu of the lotus eyes in her heart as she left Sudeṣṇa's palace. Seeing the sun, she bowed her head in prayer.

"If my mind is faithful to the Pāṇḍavas, have compassion,
protect me from Kīcaka."

And the sun, moved by her grief,
sent a demon, strong and fierce, to guard that woman.
He came down, invisible, from the sky, and stood behind her.

Draupadi walked to Siṃhabala's house and went in,
as a deer would enter a thicket where a tiger lies in wait.

She said to Kīcaka:

"My mistress is thirsty, and has sent me to bring liquor.
Please pour some out for me to take." That evil man
fixed his eyes on her face and said:

"You are ready to sate the thirst of your mistress, and I
am her brother: would it be fair
not to satisfy the thirst *I* feel
by pouring out your love?

Everything I have—my elephants and horses and chariots—are yours. You are the mistress of all my wealth. I'll give you brilliant jewels and ornaments, palaces fit for pleasure, lovely servant girls; even my wives will serve you, and I, too, will obey the merest sign from your eyes. You rule from now on."

Inside him, lust was raging, more and more wild, and, forgetting he who was, he fell on her.

Now the power of the demon who was guarding her from behind entered into her body, so she easily extricated herself from Kīcaka's grip, and fled the house.

Pushed away, he pursued her. She looked back in fear, wondering where she could take refuge. Luckily, King Virāṭa was holding court, so she ran straight into the assembly. But Kīcaka, driven by lust and crazy with pride, followed right after her, unconcerned that his secret desire would be seen.

Like an elephant in heat frantically trying to catch hold of a moving vine,
or an antigod swiftly pursuing a goddess who came down to earth,
or a cruel hawk swooping down upon a delicate snake,
or a powerful cat pouncing on a young mynah bird,
Siṃhabala, fierce and angry, grabbed her by the hair
and, without any hesitation, kicked her, so she fell.

[Draupadi's guardian demon threw Kīcaka to the ground; embarrassed, Kīcaka quickly picked himself up, before anyone could see—but he was very angry, like a snake unable to bite. Both Yudhiṣṭhira and Bhīma were present there; Bhīma was ready to assault Kīcaka, but Yudhiṣṭhira restrained him with a gesture of his eyes. Draupadi, seeing that there was no help to be expected from her husbands, addressed King Virāṭa:]

"In their heart of hearts they know what is right and what is wrong,
and they know, too, the duty of protecting good and punishing evil.
They can perform wonders with all kinds of weapons.
They are famous for their skill at crushing the strongest of enemies.
Yet these five husbands of mine just sit there, doing nothing,
when one man is chasing me. How strange! No housewife is safe
any more.

In this royal court, not even one man is ready to stand up
and say one word in defense of what is just.

While all of you are watching, this Kīcaka is trying
to hurt me, as no man has hurt woman before.
I am a woman devoted to her husbands, gentle
and blameless: shouldn't someone or other
show compassion now?

But this king is responsible for the Matysa kingdom;
he's the one to be blamed. Whenever anyone
commits wrong of any kind, the king should know
and punish. But when Kīcaka kicks me here,
right in front of him, this king just sits there
and does nothing."

Virāṭa heard her, and pitied the woman, but he was too timid
to be angry at Kīcaka. So he consoled him—and Kīcaka,
shaken and angry still, calmed down and went home.

Meanwhile, Yudhiṣṭhira was disturbed at heart; his forehead
was flowing with sweat that came of anger, but he pushed away
these feelings and, exerting control, appeared unperturbed.
In his usual voice, he spoke to Draupadi:

"Now everybody—the king and the court—have seen it all,
and you keep on talking. Go back to Sudeṣṇa's palace.
Do you think your *gandharva*-husbands were not angered
by your humiliation? The time isn't ripe. You must be following
some set agreement, you and they. That's why they cannot
show their anger here. Don't blame your husbands.
A married woman should not stand here defiant
and full of fire, no matter how much she has suffered."

She heard him out, but still she did not move from that place. There was more she wanted to say. Watching her, he went on:

"You're making a scene, like a dancer, just as you please,
throwing off the self-respect of a married woman."

She gave him a withering look, full of meaning:

"Yes, my husband is an actor. That much is certain.
The seniors provide the model for the juniors. You're quite right,
Kaṅkubhaṭṭu:[10] just like my husbands, I *am* a performer.

So I know very well how to act. And my husband is not only an actor—
he's a gambler too. Does a gambler's wife have any self-respect?" And
she went away.

She was burning with humiliation. She threw herself down on her bed, her tears overflowing, and she thought, "That Siṃhabala is a powerful man. The only man who could defeat him is Bhīma, son of the Wind—with some luck." It was night, everyone was asleep. She got off the bed, washed the dust from her body, dressed in clean clothes, and went to the kitchen, where Bhīma was asleep.

"How can you lie here in comfort, Bhīmasena," she said,
"while Kīcaka, who dishonored me, is sleeping at home in his bed,
as if nothing happened? Is it because your big brother said
not to show courage?"

She was speaking softly, and he woke at the touch of her hand. "Who is this?" he said, and when she said, "It's me," he knew her voice. "She has come to tell me about Kīcaka's crime and to give me the task of punishing him," he thought, "but let me hear the way she tells it." So he said,

"Why have you come at this hour? Did you make sure
no one has seen you?" She replied,

10. Yudhiṣṭhira's name during this period of disguise.

"You know very well. Why ask? Or, knowing,
have you forgotten? If so, what's the point of telling you
again? But if you know and merely want to hear it
from me, that is fine, I will tell you—clearly,
from the beginning.

The king's brother-in-law, Siṃhabala, came to greet his sister
and caught sight of me. His mind driven by lust,
he spoke to me in various ways, showing off,
like a fool utterly without self-respect. I was disgusted

and told him off, but he didn't stop. Mad with desire,
he even propositioned me openly. I told him angrily:

'Invincible, valiant, virile,
exquisitely equipped to destroy
any enemy blinded by pride
are my husbands, all five of them,
gandharvas with bodies of gods.
Listen, Kīcaka: they will easily
ruin your fame and kill you.
Depend on that.'

He countered me with more bragging. With words right for that moment
I got rid of him and left. Later, wicked Sudeṣṇa sent me to Kīcaka's house
to bring some liquor. I objected, but she blocked me at every word, insistent. So I stopped struggling and went there for the wine; I was trusting in *your* strength, certain no one could do anything to me.

He spoke crudely and tried to grab me. I pushed him off
and went away, but he followed after.
I ran, alarmed, to where you where. That evil man
pursued me in anger. You know the rest.
I have seen today the perfect wisdom
of your brother. What is there to say, Bhīmasena?

But this is nothing new. Duḥśāsana grabbed me by the hair
in the Kuru court, and you, in all your strength and courage,
did nothing. And that's not all. Jayadratha also mistreated me,
without fear, and got away with it. Everyone saw it happen again
to me today, in this court. I'm no stranger to pain.

People say that even strangers should pay heed
to the cry of a woman and to the suffering of cattle.
How, then, could Dharmarāja just sit and watch
when Kīcaka kicked me?"

He heard, and answered:

"If Dharma's son, a golden mountain of strength,
had not held me back with a look when Kīcaka thoughtlessly
attacked you, and I was raging with anger, out of control,
I would have smashed him and his king and all his retinue—
and then everyone would have known who we were, and the pact
would be broken. We would have had to go back to the forest
for another twelve years, starting all over. Moreover,
everyone would have blamed just you and me for this disaster.

So Yudhiṣṭhira, who holds to his truth, should be praised and not
blamed.
But we're not giving up on killing Kīcaka. Don't be sad:
I'll finish him just like that and make you happy.

But we have to find a way that nobody will know. The actual killing
is nothing hard." She replied:

"I'm not afraid of Kunti, or of you, or even of God.
The only one I fear is that evil woman the queen,
with her errands for me.

Unable to voice my anger, I was suffering,
and all for nothing. My grief at losing my honor
at the hands of this idiot was tormenting my heart.
I lost my balance and spoke badly of Yudhiṣṭhira,
though I knew what was right.

But in truth I did not want to blame him, whom everyone
should praise.

Still, what can you do? Nobody can halt the flow of good and evil
that come at the inevitable moments in people's lives, propelled by fate.

Since I want you, all five of you, to rise high in honor,
I will bear all hardship—but if Kīcaka's lust cannot be thwarted
by minor devices, or if he grabs me, I'll have to blame you.

Son of the wind, believe me: if you don't kill him,
I will destroy my body right in front of your eyes
by rope or water or fire or poison
or some other way."

Bhīma smiled and said,

"You don't have to work so hard to convince me
to kill Kīcaka. If he goes on living after having humiliated you

before my eyes, no woman will be safe. It was bad enough
that I failed to show my power right then.

Tomorrow, one way or another, he will die at my hands,
wherever he might be hiding—even if Yudhiṣṭhira himself
should intervene to save him, even if *you* should beg,
out of compassion, for his life.

Until Duryodhana, Duḥśāsana, Karṇa, Śakuni, Saindhava and the rest of that evil lot are dispatched to the netherworld, my heart will be eaten away by worry, mired in disgrace, stirred to anger, impatient. Just as their time on earth is nearing its end, so our pact with them is ending. Eleven months have passed since we began this period of disguise, and the twelfth, too, is nearly over. As soon as the rest of this month is behind us, your sufferings will also end. Take heart. Siṃhabala humiliated you and still lives, but we will kill him tomorrow. Pretend to go along with him, set up a rendezvous at the theater, and tell him to come alone. When he comes, I'll kill that pretty fellow and show you his body, to deserve your love. There is no other way. This is final. We'll do just like this. Don't stray from this plan. It's almost morning. If people wake up and see us here, they'll see through our disguise and the whole plan will be ruined. We must fulfill my wish to kill him. Go back to sleep."

He left his bed and walked a few paces with her. Then he returned to his bed and lay down in anger. Draupadi went back to her sleeping quarters and threw herself on her bed; her heart was agitated, but she closed her eyes, though she could not sleep.

The sun rose. Siṃhabala quickly finished his morning activities, dressed in style, and went to Sudeṣṇa's palace. In his heart he was thinking,

"I'll hurry over to see that woman with the lovely eyes.
I'll speak to her in private and win her over, make her
accept me somehow. Then I'll bring her to some
convenient place and take her to bed, to satisfy
my hunger for her, today."

He was licking his lips. In Sudeṣṇa's chambers
he saw her, eyes like those of a goddess,
intent upon her tasks.

Seeing her excited him even more. His courage lost,
his mind shaken, unaware of his own behavior,
he could not wait even for the people around to move away
but immediately came close to her, as if he were an animal
trapped by the hunter who is God.

Draupadi saw him but pretended she had not. Knowing that Bhīma
was behind her, she was not afraid
and kept on doing what she was doing.

Kīcaka was making foolish jokes with whoever was around,
scratching the ground so that his toe rings hit one another,
crudely stretching his limbs to show off, breaking into empty laughter
over and over, drumming with his fingers on a pillar
and singing some silly song. He kept close to her,
becoming anxious the longer she would not look at him,
and his desire kept redoubling as he moved back and forth,
staring at her over and over.

Finally, that corrupt man, showing his bad taste in all ugly ways,
spoke to Draupadi:

"If I were lucky, I would deserve to serve your feet every moment.
Why not allow yourself to have me?
Or have you sworn off sexual pleasure? Tell me the truth.
Your fortune won't diminish if you let your glance stray
to other men.

I have crushed all rival kings with ease, in major battles.
All the people of the world are in my care: I encompass them
with my royal power. I rule all parts of this kingdom
and keep Virāṭa as my puppet, eating from my hand.

What's so special about you? If I desire ten thousand women
and take hold of them, show me one man
who can stand up and tell me to stop.

While Virāṭa was watching, I pushed you
in front of a thousand people: not even one of them
dared to tell me it was wrong. You said you have five husbands
who are strong. I have seen their strength and their courage.
Is there anybody else? How can you escape me?
I'll catch you, wherever you may hide. No one can stop me."

She could see he was very hot, and that all would be lost if she could not
restrain him now with words.

She had listened carefully to what he said, in so many ways,
and then looking at him as if she had softened,
pretending to give in, she spoke to him,
as if revealing what was in her heart.

"No matter how often I say 'Don't!'
you keep pursuing me in force and haste.
Think about it: other hearts, too,
might suffer when Desire strikes,
like yours. Does that mean we have to
blast it all over? Can't prudence
and desire lie down together?

Men, when they're in love, can't contain it.
They're obsessed. But women, no matter how much
they love, hold it in their heart. Because they're strong,
they don't ruin it by breaking all limits.

You should know this and then, without letting the secret out,
you can enjoy whatever you wish, to the limits of desire."

Kīcaka was overjoyed. "Passion," he said,
"has made me lose control. But let go of that.
Why did you have to torture me so long?
From now on I'll take your commands to heart
and do as you say. Just tell me when, and where,
and how."

Now Pāñcāli was sure she had him. She said,
as if deeply in love,

"That theater where Uttara[11] and other young women
have their dancing lessons all day long—
that's where lovers go at night for secret meetings.
That's the best place for this sort of thing—
so long as you come alone."

His face broke out in a smile. "If you're ready,
my beauty, I'll do just as you say. I'll be there tonight,
all alone.

This is our agreement. Don't forget."
"Yes," she said, stressing that *alone,* "just come by yourself
or else I won't stay—that's for sure.

But we shouldn't go on talking here
for long, without care. Go now:
I have work to do."

11. Virāṭa's daughter, Kīcaka's niece.

Now that the details were settled, Kīcaka happily went home,
his heart brimming with her words. For her part, Draupadi
attended to her chores, then went into the kitchen.

She was smiling as she spoke, with skillful phrases,
to Bhīma, to inflame his hidden anger:

"I've done my part. Now it's your turn
to kill him, tonight, when darkness falls,
so the world won't know."

Bhīma smiled. "Anger, unexpressed,
has been burning my heart; I am in anguish.
Now you have energized me by achieving,
so quickly, this impossible, double-edged task.
Even Dharmarāja will be pleased
at the marvelous way we've planned revenge."

But then he had doubt.

"Are you sure he will come, unsuspecting,
to the place you fixed? Might he not bring
some others along? He's a fool, and might brag
without thinking, so that the secret is lost."

"Why would he do that? I spoke pleasantly to him
and told him precisely what he had to do,
and I observed the smile on his face.
He won't stray.
There's no doubt in his heart."

Bhīma said,

"Blind with lust as he is, he will come, alone.
When he enters the theater, he'll look for you
and find me. Then he will fight and, depleted
by my strength, he will die to make you happy.
I have no doubt, and no cause for worry."

"Good," she said, "May the Goddess of Victory
be with you. For now, Sudeṣṇa will be looking
for me. I shouldn't delay." And she left, happy.

(Kīcaka spent the day in a torment of impatient longing. That night,)

after the moon set, to the delight of thieves and adulterers,
darkness set in: one could not tell
a highland from a lowland, inside from out.
It made no difference if your eyes were open or closed.

That was when Draupadi went to Bhīma and said,
"This is the moment."

Bhīma's heart opened up, as if he had been invited to his wedding.
He put on his turban and looked at Draupadi:
"Follow me, a few paces behind," he said.

He set off at a quick pace, without showing any other sign
of his excitement—no fury, no sound. He was ready
to fight: he was Draupadi's husband, though no one could detect
his inner rage. He entered the theater that was

dark as the mind of a fool, mysterious as the love of a proud woman, unpeopled as a dense and terrible forest, useless as the wealth of a miser, impenetrable as a text unread, invisible as an object found in a dream, unilluminated like a bad poem, and attractive to adulterers and thieves like the kingdom of an inefficient king.

Groping with his hands, he found, in the middle of the room, the bed that served Virāṭa's daughter. He asked Draupadi to sit quietly, not too far away, while he lay down on the bed.

And Kīcaka came: all dressed up, his body swollen with lust, moving lightly, his mind reeling from the liquor of longing.

Like an elephant rushing into a lion's cave,
he approached the place where Bhīma was already lying.
His lust was blazing, to the point of madness,
and he thought: "Why has Desire not yet rushed
that woman here?"

Inside himself, he was blind with pride at his power,
no question in his mind. He went in, ego first,
toward the middle of the theater, feeling his way,
until he found the bed and, overjoyed,
stretched out his hand.

The son of the Wind steadied his body, which was shaking
with violent anger, and waited, playing along,
interested to see what Kīcaka would do or say.

The brutish Kīcaka put his hands on Bhīma, thinking
Draupadi was there, and his body was thrilling as he said,
his heart stormy with passion:

"My dear, I've brought some lovely things
specially for you. Here, take them. Usually,
you know, women are taken by desire when they see me
and shower *me* with bribes and gifts.

A woman whose mind is ensnared by me never thinks of another man.
Once she is fascinated by my beauty, she can't keep her hands off me.
Imagining my charms, she will die with desire.
When she acquires a taste for my wit, she's on fire, head to foot.
My delightful conversation is a trap for women's hearts.
You alone have power over me. Need I say more?"

Hearing all this, Bhīma was disgusted at heart, but he answered
softly, with hidden meanings, so that Draupadi, nearby, could hear:

"So that is how you are: no wonder you can praise yourself.
But can you find a woman who looks like me
anywhere, no matter how hard you search? You may not know
what you are saying.

You can't imagine what will happen to your body
when it is joined to mine. You can't compare me
to any woman. You've made a mistake.

Do you think you will touch another woman
after touching me? Soon you'll know what it really means
to have a body—the end of love."

Quickly, now, he arose, with a wild laugh
that stirred Kīcaka's heart. He grabbed his head
and bent it. Feeling that great strength, Kīcaka
still didn't understand. He released himself
from Bhīma's grip, his body aflame with anger.

He thought it must be one of those *gandharvas*.

He grabbed hold of Bhīma's hands and threw him
to the ground, folding his knees against his body.
Like a snake struck by a stick, Bhīma raised his torso high,
his limbs swelling with furious anger.

Now he regained his hold on Kīcaka, but Kīcaka, in turn,
gripped him, pushing hard, and for a while
the two of them were equally matched,
body pressed to body, struggling fiercely.

But they pounded each other silently, cautiously—
for Kīcaka was afraid people would find out he had been tricked,
and Bhīma feared that his disguise would be disclosed.

As they wrestled like this for a long time,
Bhīma's strength gradually increased, as Kīcaka's waned.

Bhīma knew it and pinned him down, as a lion
takes hold of a deer, but Kīcaka rose again,
matching anger for anger.

And as he rose, reaching for his foe from behind,
Bhīma pounded him with his fists
in his vital spot—and Kīcaka fell,
his eyes bulging, feet kicking wildly.

As an elephant uproots a tree loaded with flowers and fruit,
Bhīma, son of the Wind, threw Kīcaka, in all his finery,
to the ground.

He wanted to deform him in his dying.
He killed him and then forced the head, the stout arms,
and the feet into his torso and pounded it all
against the ground, like beating a sack,
until there was nothing but a dense, neat lump.

Then he told Draupadi that Kīcaka was dead,
and she was pleased but still shaken,
having witnessed this cruel end.

So he brought fire in secret
and made it blaze higher
to show her, and now surprise
and fear and pleasure all mingled together
as she looked. She drew near to Bhīma, standing
behind that extraordinary corpse.

She stared at it, gestured with her hand,
shook her head in amazement, and
put her finger on her nose[12] as she said:
"Well, Kīcaka, was it for this that you struggled so?
Be happy now. Once you tormented me, this was certain
to come."

Bhīma said:

"The thorn is out. Did you enjoy
my fight? Have the flames of your anger cooled?
You saw what happened to that evil man. I hope you're happy.
Not even the strongest hero will survive in my hands
if he tries to touch you."

12. A gesture of disapproval and surprise.

She looked at Siṃhabala's killer and said, her heart flowing with happiness:

"Yesterday, in the court, you had the strength to control your anger.
Today you came here very quietly, so that no one knew.
Without calling on any of our people for help, you performed an act
of great courage. In the snap of a finger, you made Kīcaka formless,
that scourge of the world. Who am I to watch this, to contemplate it,
to praise? Though I know that you're the real hero of the story,
my words fail. I am flooded with astonishing joy."

He liked hearing this. Yudhiṣṭhira's younger brother was happy as he said to Draupadi: "You shouldn't stay here any longer." And he went away.

FIVE

Mañcana

Late twelfth to early thirteenth centuries?

A poet of uncertain date, but clearly exemplifying the early and relatively simple *prabandha* style, Mañcana presents us with the earliest Telugu extract from the *kathā* narrative tradition. His *Keyūra-bāhu-caritramu* takes Rājaśekhara's Sanskrit play, *Viddha-sālabhañjikā*, for its frame narrative, but the superb short tales that constitute most of the work are derived from other *kathā* sources, including some known from the *Pañcatantra* literature (as in our third selection, below).[1]

THE BRAHMIN WHO KEPT HIS WIFE IN THE BASEMENT[2]

Once there was an aged Brahmin, skilled at physiognomy. He took to wife a young virgin whose body had all the good signs, and he kept her in the basement, so that she would not become addicted to other men. She matured there[3] and became beautiful. Her husband waited for the right moment and went down there one night. He looked at her affectionately; he wanted to make love right away. She pointed at a burning lamp and said, "Fire is a man. The light is fire. I shouldn't set my eyes on another man, and it isn't right for him to see me. I disapprove of women who make love to their husbands with the light on." So she put out the light and made love to him.

He was happy. His wife's gentle words touched him, and he was sure

1. See George Artola, "Ten Tales from the *Pañcatantra,*" *Adyar Library Bulletin* 29 (1965), 30–73.

2. Mañcana, *Keyūra-bāhu-caritramu,* ed. Vedamu Venkatarayasastri (Madras: Vedamu Venkatarayasastri and Sons, 1970), 3.213–45.

3. This was clearly a prepuberty marriage.

she was a virtuous girl. So he relaxed. A few months passed. She became pregnant, and one night, in private, when she was about to go into labor, she said to him: "If the child who is going to be born is not a girl but a boy, he will be a strange man to me. I won't look at him. Women who want to go to heaven will never look at any male other than their husband. Whenever I even hear about other men, my ears hurt. My eyes and ears are only for seeing you and hearing you. I wish they didn't exist at times when you're not there." So she bound her eyes with a piece of cloth.

Her husband believed her and brought her out of the basement and into the house. She gave birth to a son, whom she raised without ever looking at him. Everybody laughed at her strictness.

One day her husband's uncle came from another village to see his grandnephew. He found out what was going on in the house, and he thought: "This whore is pretending to be a pious and innocent girl, while she eats up all three worlds in the night. If I don't tell that fool of a nephew, he'll never know. Moreover, if a woman is left alone in the house, without any of her husband's family near, or if she spends a lot of time in her mother's house, or goes to fairs and festivals, or hangs out with the neighbors or with other men, or makes friends with bad women, or if her husband travels a lot, or is harsh with her, or takes up with another woman in her place—no woman in these conditions will be faithful. A young woman gives fresh life to an old man, but an old man is like poison to a young woman. A young man brings new life to an old woman, but an old woman is poison to a young man."

So one morning, when his nephew went out to visit his farm at the edge of the village, the uncle went, too. He chatted with him a little, and then said: "It's only proper that I should let you know what your wife is doing at night. I've found out everything. Not trusting women at all, or trusting them too much—both are bad. When she was little, you kept her in the basement, and now you are blind and give her too much freedom. You don't have to hide something you don't do, but you can never hush up something you've done. This holds true even for gods, how much more so for human being? Even Indra, king of heaven, Bṛhaspati's friend, with all his power and wealth, couldn't hide his deeds. Don't think of your love for your son, or your love for her. Punish her. Are wives meant to ruin families? Anyway, I'm leaving." And he left, with tears in his eyes.

The Brahmin stood there for a while and then went home, deeply ashamed. He told his wife he was going to a distant village, spoke gently and affectionately to her, and left from the front door. He spent the day in hiding. That evening he slipped back into his house and went up to the attic, from where he could see his wife. Late in the night, the washerman came, very eager, under the pretext of bringing clean clothes. The wife quickly removed the cloth from her eyes, closed the door tightly and

bolted it, and looked around, just to be sure her husband wasn't there. Then she ran to embrace the washerman and, full of lust, brought him into her room. "He's away," she said. "Don't worry. It will take him at least ten days to get there, let alone return. I'm on fire with desire: satisfy me now. I've made some hot pancakes for you to eat." And she served them on the plate used for daily worship of the gods.

The Brahmin saw them both eating from this plate and was struck with amazement, shame, grief, and anger. He came down from the attic, which opened into the courtyard; he fetched the night watchmen and ordered them to arrest the lovers and take them to the king. The king was very angry and had the pair punished. The villagers recounted the story of this atrocious whore again and again. The Brahmin, wounded from his experience, was unwilling to remarry. He went off to Benares.

QUICK WIT[4]

In Razor City lived a Brahmin named Competent, very smart and very young and, through the fault of youth, very lusty. His neighbor's wife was extraordinarily beautiful. Her husband was a fierce, angry soldier. Still, Competent was determined to seduce her. Whenever she walked alone, he would bow down to her, begging for her favor. The soldier husband caught wind of this from the neighbors and was disturbed. "I'll see what that Brahmin fellow is up to," he thought. So he waited in the courtyard, behind a wall, unseen by Competent.

His wife came there on some household errand. Competent emerged from his house and walked toward her and, as always, bowed to her quickly. The soldier suddenly pounced on him. The Brahmin didn't panic. He went on bowing, in each of the directions, made a circumambulation with a loud chant, and repeatedly bowed to the Sun God. The soldier thought to himself that this must be his usual morning ritual, so he let go of his anger and went away.

It's good to think fast in an emergency.

THE OBLIGING HUSBAND[5]

In the city of the Yakṣas[6] lived Soft-Spoken with his wife, Clever, to whom he was deeply devoted. She was very pregnant. The people of the town were all going to see the festival of the god Viṣṇu. Soft-Spoken spoke to his wife, softly: "You're a young girl. You haven't been out much

4. Mañcana,2.20–25.
5. Mañcana,4.84–94.
6. Middle-level divine beings, ruled by Kubera.

lately. I'll stay home, and you can go and enjoy the festival." She replied, "Is it any fun for me to go without you? Even if you insist, how can I go carrying this heavy load in my belly?"

He answered, "Go anyway, and I'll carry the pregnancy until you come back." And he took over the pregnancy, while she went off. She enjoyed watching the festival, but when it was finished, and everyone was going home, her mind took a different direction. She stopped herself on the way back, forgetting the favor her husband had done her. For she was thinking, "What's the point of going home? He'll just give the pregnancy back to me. I wasn't even able to sleep well. Why should I put up with this? Did he feed me, or give me anything? I gave him back his lousy seed. What do I care if people blame me or praise me? Why should I suffer through the pregnancy, weak and moaning? To say nothing of the labor pangs and the risk of dying. I was lucky enough to get out of it. Why go back?" So she found another Yaksa and went her way.

Her husband bore the child as it grew heavier and heavier, until he could hardly breathe. He called deliriously for his wife—and died.

Don't trust others. If you have to trust somebody, don't trust your enemies. Even worse, don't ever trust your wife.

SIX

Ĕr̤r̤āpragaḍa

Fourteenth century

The third and last of the Telugu *Mahābhārata* poets (known collectively as *kavi-traya,* the Trinity of Poets), Ĕr̤r̤āpragaḍa completed the *Āraṇyaparvamu* from the place where Nannaya left off.[1] Significantly, in the early colophons to that section of the work, Ĕr̤r̤āpragaḍa does not mention his own name; rather, in an extraordinary statement of respect for Nannaya, he signs the latter's name and continues the dedication to Rājarājanarendra (dead for 300 years). Only in the final colophon verses (3.7.469–470) does he assume responsibility for having composed the work "in a style that reveals something of Nannaya's" (*tat-kavitā-rītiyu ḳŏnta dopa ṭad-racanayakā*).

In addition, Ĕr̤r̤āpragaḍa composed a Telugu *Harivaṃśamu* and a *Nṛsiṃha-purāṇamu* (on the shrine of Ahobilam). A *Rāmāyaṇa* attributed to him has been lost, as has a polemical work on poetry (*Kavi-sarpa-garuḍamu*)—although the attribution of the latter may well be imaginary.[2] Later in the fourteenth century, Śrīnātha, in the voice of his patron Vemārĕḍḍi, praises Ĕr̤r̤ana's *sūkti-vaicitri,* "complexity of utterance."[3] The tradition offers Ĕr̤r̤āpragaḍa the title *prabandha-parameśvara,* "master of compositions." Modern scholars have sometimes argued that even this title reflects only Ĕr̤r̤āpragaḍa's ability to connect and complete the portions left over by Nannaya and Tikkana.

Pragaḍa, in the poet's name, is actually a title, "minister," perhaps adopted by Brahmins who achieved political power. *Ĕr̤r̤ā/Ĕr̤r̤ana* probably derives from the name of the god Poturāja, the "red" meat–eating god who

1. See introduction to the Nannaya chapter, pp. 55–56.

2. A few verses from the *Kavi-sarpa-gāruḍamu,* with attribution to Ĕr̤r̤ana, are quoted by the eighteenth-century poet Kastūri Raṅgakavi in his *Ānanda-raṅga-rāṭ-chandamu.*

3. Śrīnātha, *Kāsī-khaṇḍamu* (Hyderabad: Teluga University, 1992), 1.13.

accompanies the goddess. The poet's family is associated with the village of Guḍlūru in Pākanāḍu (Addaṅki area of present-day Rāyalasīma), and with the temple of the god Nīlakaṇṭha-Śiva there. This may explain Ĕr̲r̲āpragaḍa's other title, *śambhu-dāsa,* "servant of Śiva"—a name that the poet himself mentions in the introduction to his *Nṛsiṃha-purāṇa,* where his grandfather appears in a dream and asks him to compose the book.

The selection below illustrates Ĕr̲r̲āpragaḍa's straightforward *purāṇa*-style narrative mode, very characteristic of this period in Telugu *prabandha* forms.

VENA AND PṚTHU[4]

(Janamejaya asks Vaiśampāyana:)

How was King Pṛthu born?
How did he milk the earth?
Who milked her of wonderful things
at his command?
It must be an interesting story.
Please tell it in full.

Vaiśampāyana said:

In the first age, a king called An˙ga married Death's daughter. She gave birth to strong-armed Vena. He became king and, cruel as his maternal grandfather, made people suffer. He put aside right action and became addicted to whatever was contrary to the Veda. "Do nothing good," he ordered his people. "Don't even think of performing rituals. I'll kill you, whoever you might be, if you disobey.

I am the sacrifice,
the deity who receives it,
and the sacrificer:
think of me as all three.
If you want to perform any ritual,
do it for me."

So all meditation ceased.
Even the name of the Veda was no longer heard.
The drinking of Soma died out.
The fire went hungry for oblations

4. Ĕr̲r̲āpragaḍa, *Hari-vaṃśamu* (Madras: Vavilla Ramasvamisastrulu and Sons, 1967), 1.1.98–117, 119–34, 146.

when all worship of the gods was cut off.
Even the elements of existence ceased to function.
There was an end to helping others and to giving gifts.
Vows and fasting were heard of no more.
They say, "People do as the king does,"
and it came true: once Vena turned away
from good action, all his subjects followed suit.

The sages were alarmed at this state of affairs. They went to the king and said:

"Is it right for you to uproot all ritual
by terrifying the people?
We're planning to perform a rite
that lasts for many years. You are the king
of the whole universe. Regard our activity
with favor, with a mind rooted in goodness.

When we make a warrior into a king,
when we put him on the throne for the first time,
we expect him to keep his contract:
to guard his people and keep the world on course.
Think about that."

He laughed out loud and said,
"Is there anyone who can tell *me* what to do?
I'm the law. If I please, I can throw the earth itself
into the ocean. I can smash the sky.
I can burn up endless universes.
Don't be insolent to me.

You are fools. Get away from here." They, however, kept trying to convince him. The more they tried to instruct him, the uglier he became. Finally, they were so angry that they bound him by their inner power and crushed him to death. Then they churned his left thigh with *kuśa* grass and *mantras.* Like half-burned wood, a black dwarfish man appeared, too ugly to look at. Fearfully, he stood before them with folded hands. The sages said to him in Sanskrit, "*Niṣīda* —drop dead!" They banished him. That's how the Niṣādas[5] were born, out of impurity. The evil people who inhabit the Vindhyas and other mountain regions, the Kirātas and Kaivartas, are his children. Those great Brahmins, however,

5. By popular etymology, *Niṣāda* comes from *niṣīda.*

skillfully, rapidly churned Vena's right palm.
Like the spark that flies when a dry stick is rubbed
against another,

Pṛthu appeared, long-armed,
holding the Ājagava bow and burning arrows,
and he himself was shining in his armor
and his wisdom, which could conquer the world.

No sooner was he born
than all the elements of creation
gathered around him, eager to serve,
in noble form.

The ocean came to bathe him,
its rivers filled to overflowing.
Brahmā and Indra and all the other gods
and the famous sages came to see him.

This newborn son, because he was good,
released his father from the Hell called "Put,"[6]
the Hell of sonlessness, so Vena now
went to heaven.

All the people gathered there
put Pṛthu on a throne and, anointing him
with water and chants, endowed him
with sovereign power, as drums resounded
through space and the gods rejoiced.

And the gods returned to their homes, satisfied, after giving the king wealth and strength.

The thousands who had fled in dejection
when Vena went wrong now turned back
toward the new king, their hearts alive,
for he alone deserved that title, skilled as he was
and rich in statecraft.

The ocean became dry land,
mountains lay flat,
even the sky turned into a plain
and fire receded
when he was on the move:

6. A conventional folk-etymology for *putra,* "son"—he who saves from Put.

nothing, above ground or beneath it,
stood in the way of his chariot.

Crops grew without plowing or sowing.
Cows gave as much as one wanted.
Trees were heavy with honeyed fruit.

At that time, Brahmā was performing a sacrifice. Out of the Soma-pressing a sage called Sūta was born, and from the sacrifice came a another sage called Māgadha. Brahmā ordered them to become bards, praising the gods. The gods and sages called them and said, "Go and praise King Pṛthu, after you find out, in your hearts, what he intends to do, his special acts." They went there and sang his praises in words sweet, deep, and delicious, noble and perfect. Pṛthu, the first great donor, was pleased and gave the Sūta land to the Sūta and the Māgadha land to the Māgadha, for their livelihood. People who had come to the king on other business saw these acts of largesse and hoped that they, too, would be given land for living, so, winning him over, they requested: "Please give us permanent income." The king agreed.

He took his terrible bow and burning arrows and said,
"Let this earth give all the people whatever they desire,
at any time. Otherwise, I will break her into pieces."
Frightened, the earth became a cow and ran away.
The invincible warrior of yogic powers, very angry,
chased the cow, who ran through all the worlds,
including Brahmā's. He was close behind her,
wherever she fled, and she could not shake him.
No one was there to give her shelter,

so she surrendered to him and said, submissively:

"King, if you really want to feed your people,
what good will it do to destroy me? It won't work.
I bear the whole world, moving and still.
If I am ruined, you will be ruined as well.

Food is in my hands. Can bodies survive
without food? Give up this narrow vision,
find an effective way, and follow it."

The king said, "To kill many living beings
either for oneself or for others
is evil. But if you can protect all beings
by killing one, is that wrong?

Since you won't do what I want you to,
I'll kill you and give sustenance
to all that lives, so they live fully,
and make my power felt everywhere.
It's a fair thing to do.

I know you can give everything. You just want to cause me pain by refusing me. The other way is for you to become the milkmaid[7] of my needs, and thus to survive. In that case I will withdraw my dreadful arrow, aimed at you." The Goddess Earth thought a little, looked at him, and said:

"Make different creatures into calves to draw whatever they want as milk from me, with this bovine body. I'll give what is needed. This is the best strategy. And one thing more. My body is not level, with high places and low. Make it look good." Agreeing, he employed many workmen and gathered rocks into mountains; he made all places lovely, and ordered villages and downs to be built. In the beginning, there were no houses, no crops, no cattle-breeding, no trade. People just gathered food, like roots and berries, with great effort. Because of Pṛthu's rule, all things were produced—or so we have heard.

That unequaled man made Svāyambhuva Manu into a calf and, using his own hands as a vessel, milked the earth-cow. He made it possible for human beings to raise crops forever into the future, so that nothing was wasted.

He then called all who live in the universe and told them:
"Milk this earth as you please, with your own calves, one by one."

And so they did:[8] everything, moving or still, achieved its aim. The earth, gushing with milk, followed Pṛthu's command and became his daughter; that is why she is called Pṛthvi, just as she is called Medini because she was made out of the fat (*medas*) of Madhuand Kaiṭabha, whom Viṣṇu killed. She became rich with crops, minerals, and precious stones, peopled with cities and villages, filled with living beings. Pṛthu, who did this, was the first king, happy in kingship.

7. *Duhitṛ*—also "daughter."
8. There follows a long list of individual milkings by various classes of beings.

SEVEN

Nācana Somanātha

Fourteenth century

In an inscription in 1344 (although there are competing readings that would move the date backwards), the Vijayanagara king Bukkarāya I gives Nācana Somanātha the village of Pĕñcukaladinnĕ, also known as Bukkarāyapuram. This poet consciously connected himself to Tikkana's *Mahābhārata,* which he claimed to have completed with his own *Uttara-harivaṃśamu.* Like Tikkana, Nācana Somanātha dedicated his work to the god Harihara. Since Ĕṟṟāpragaḍa also composed a *Harivaṃśamu,* scholars have argued at length over the relative merits of these two poets. There is much justice in the epithets Nācana Somanātha gave himself in his colophons: *saṃvidhāna-cakravarti,* "a master of structure/storytelling," and *navīna-guṇa-sanāthuḍu,* "innovative poet"; in these respects he contributed to the transition from a straightforward narrative (*purāṇa*) to a more intense style (*kāvya*) seen, for example, in Śrīnātha. In addition, he was a brilliant creator of images and of forceful, articulate characters, such as Narakâsura and Ūrvaśi in the selection we have chosen.

Here the demon Narakâsura has overrun Amarāvati, the city of Indra and other gods. As the conquering king, he summons Ūrvaśi, Indra's courtesan, the most beautiful woman in the world. This is a delicate situation for Ūrvaśi: as a courtesan, she cannot refuse the commands of the king, but she has no love for the demon and does not want to go. Nācana Somanātha shows us her intelligent handling of this problem; moreover, in the course of her response, Ūrvaśi exposes Narakâsura as a tasteless, macho braggart.

Nācana Somanātha's text presents only the second part of *Harivamsa;* it seems the first half lacked the narrative power to interest him. In any case, there is no evidence that he ever composed a Telugu version of the first part of this work. Another work attributed to him, quoted briefly by Kastūri Raṅgakavi (eighteenth century), is a *Hari-vilāsamu* or *Hara-vilāsamu*

(Raṅgakavi uses both titles; possibly there were two different works). A *Vasanta-vilāsamu* of Nācana Somanātha, also lost, is cited by Kūcimañci Timmakavi in the eighteenth century.[1]

NARAKA AND ŪRVAŚI[2]

Naraka won the war [with Indra]. His armies
gloating at the riches now theirs,
he entered Amarāvati,[3] to find the glory
now his.

But all the crossroads were empty
of dancers, singers, drums.
The front yards of the palaces
had no saffron or lotus designs.
Doorways lacked jeweled garlands
and painted elephants.
Windows were without waiting eyes
or camphor incense.
No fine flags or yak-tail fans
graced the upper terraces.
He saw all this ruin, and his heart
was overjoyed.

Rampaging demons dragged deserted women from their houses, where they were hiding to save their honor, and chose the most beautiful among them, herding them to one place. Some of the women tried to run away, but the heartless demons caught them by the hair and threatened them as they pleaded, "I'm your sister! Please let me go," wiping their tears on the edge of their saris. Other demons were searching everywhere for nubile women to give as gifts to their masters; when they took them, the girls' mothers fell upon them, unable to let them go, and the demons brutally threw them off, cursing them as they went off happily with their prey. Others, more intelligent, went looking for gold, tearing apart the palaces; some would carefully pry off the jewel-studded door frames and then force the young sons of the gods to carry them on their heads to their homes. The demons who had come without horses or elephants tied

1. Appakavi cites a verse of Nācana Somanātha's *Uttara-harivaṃśamu* 5.47, but attributes it to a work called *Ādi-purāṇamu*.

2. Nācana Somanātha, *Uttara-harivaṃśamu* (Tenali: Potukucci Subrahmanyasastri, 1987), 1.50–80.

3. The capital of Indra, king of the gods.

down the gods' aerial chariots with ropes lest they fly off of their own accord, since they needed them to make off with their loot. Jeweled pillars, smashed golden pots, broken boxes and trunks, perforated conches, unhinged doorways, scattered anklets, upside-down gateways, multistoried houses that had collapsed, deserted neighborhoods, discarded weapons —Narakâsura surveyed all this and smiled. Entering the gate of Indra's palace, he dismounted from his vehicle, passed through several courtyards, and noticed that the women had already fled. Seating himself on the jeweled, elevated throne,

he ordered one of his attendants to bring Ūrvaśi[4] to him.
Ten rushed off to scour the palaces of the gods. Meanwhile,
the new king sat listening to the music
of the heavenly singers.

The demons found her and said,
"Ūrvaśi, why are you running away?
Our king has asked for you. Everyone
is after you. Come at once."

She was a strong woman. She faced them, though still there was fear.

She had taken off her jewelry, but her beauty
filled the empty spaces.
She took off her flowers, yet the fragrance of musk
lingered in her hair.
Her skin, without makeup,
seemed smooth and protected.
Her sari was soiled, her curves
stunning to see.
Her movements simple, effortless,
eyes no longer teasing,
tender lips without a smile:
you could tell that she was scared.

The demon king saw her.
Smoothed his hair.
Fixed his clothes.
Preened himself.
Tore a tender flower
with his nails.
Shivered with desire.

4. One of the most beautiful of the gods' courtesan-dancers.

Ūrvaśi knew. Knew lust
had driven him to summon her.
Inside, she was ashamed.

Her eyes looked down, behind long lashes,
lightning flashing through mist. Softly
she came through the court to a pillar
and stood there, like a painting, a sculpted image,
a bronze taken from its cast, unmoving.

Narakâsura spoke: "Indra was no match.
He ran away, with the lords of space.
His women, frightened,
went into hiding. But you—you're a whore,
anybody's friend. Why did *you* leave town?

I took over heaven at one stroke. I walk through
the gardens of the gods. Their women cool my body
with a soft breeze wafted from their fans. Now that I rule
this kingdom, I have what I wanted.
But until *your* eyes flood my court with moonlight,
my wish is not complete.

Look! Here are Indra's chariots,
Kubera's elephants, Varuṇa's horses,
the soldiers who serve Yama. My servants
caught them all as they were fleeing.
Take your pick of them, my pretty:
whatever you want is yours.

I won't make promises and then fail
to make good. I won't make you a laughingstock
among your friends. If you have me, you'll lack nothing.
Take me. I'll bring the pleasures of earth and heaven
to your door."

Now Ūrvaśi was a little disturbed. Recovering somewhat, she said:

"Good talker, aren't you? And a good lover.
You have the whole world at your command,
so you don't lack women. It's my good luck
that you want me.
But then why didn't you come to me before
in all your grandeur, boldly,
and ask?"

He laughed. "Blame me—this is
your chance. Do you think
I would come to the world of *your* gods
just to whore after you? I come
as a conqueror. I wouldn't sneak
through the back door."

All smiles, she replied:
"In that case, I wouldn't want
you here, so unsure of yourself.
But then why didn't you call me
to your place? Aren't you my friend?"

He said: "Indra was my enemy,
and you were his woman. No real man
would break the code and send for you.
You're playing with me, just like a whore."

She thought a moment.
"Yes, I'm a whore. And you have power.
You defeated Indra and ordered your men
to catch me. It's a game for you.
I'm a wreck. What can you get
from this body? The parrot gone,
what use is the cage? Can you make love
without love?

I don't know if it's a joke,
but they say heaven is full of women,
young and delicious.
I sold my youth long ago
in the bazaar. You don't want me.
People don't pick
wilted flowers."

Said the king: "You're pretending,
just to keep me away. Even old peppercorns
are spicier than a heap of maize. I'd rather have you
in my bed than all these young women."

She looked at him and smiled;
coyly blinked her eyes. "You're the king.
I can't beat you at words.
Listen to me.

Indra has lost. You're the master
of all his wealth. All his women
serve your whim. I'm no different.
You rule the worlds where sages worship,
so what's left?

Let *them* give you a share
of their offerings, and I'll give you
paradise; you won't even
have to ask.
It's power
that turns women on."

Now he answered:

"You're right. Indra and the other
lords of space still control those worlds.
I have to grab my share, or you will all
laugh at me. I will be
a real king."

So he agreed and sent Ūrvaśi away.[5]

5. Narakâsura, thus put off by Ūrvaśi, now concentrates on taking control of the sages' sacrifice. This leads to Kṛṣṇa's intervention and the death of the demon king.

EIGHT

Śrīnātha

Late fourteenth to early fifteenth centuries

Kavi-sārva-bhauma, "universal sovereign of poets," is the title the literary tradition has given to Śrīnātha, whose amazing versatility and originality produced a revolution in literary style and taste. (The title is taken from Śrīnātha's own introduction to his *Kāśī-khaṇḍamu* [1.14] where he inserts it into the mouth of Allāḍa Vemārĕḍḍi, older brother of the king, Vīrabhadrārĕḍḍi; this older brother heard that Śrīnātha was composing the book about Kāśī and asked the poet, whom he praises in this way, to dedicate it to the king.) Like a conquering emperor, Śrīnātha traveled throughout the entire Andhra region and beyond, establishing the image of a cultural community bound together by its language and poetry. Patronized by many great lords, he transcended all his patrons, in a sense creating for them the stature and power to which they pretended. Śrīnātha wrote these patrons into existence; he created gods and kings.

He mentions his mother, Bhīmâmba, and his father, Márayâmātya; with even more signal respect he refers to his grandfather, Kamalanābhâmātya, from an unidentified town named Kālpaṭṭaṇam, somewhere on the Andhra coast. We know several of his patrons: Māmiḍi Siṅganna, the minister of Pĕda Komaṭi Vemārĕḍḍi of the Kŏṇḍavīḍu Rĕḍḍi kings (*Naiṣadhamu*); Avaci Tippayya Sĕṭṭi, a wealthy merchant of Nĕllūru (*Haravilāsamu*); King Vīrabhadrārĕḍḍi of Rajahmundry (*Kāśī-khaṇḍamu*); Bĕṇḍapūḍi Annayâmātya, a rich relative of the poet's and a minister of the Rĕḍḍi kings (*Bhīma-khaṇḍamu*); and Mummaḍi-devayya Śāntayya of Śrīśailam (*Śiva-rātri-māhātmyamu*), although it was the head of the Bhikṣā-vṛtti math at Śrīśailam, Śānta Bhikṣā-vṛtti, who encouraged him to write the latter work (1.18). In addition to these patrons, the *cāṭu* tradition associates him with Harihara II of Vijayanagara, where he is said to have defeated the rival poet-scholar Gauḍa Ḍiṇḍima Bhaṭṭu.

Śrīnātha gives us a list of his earlier compositions: *Marutta-rāṭ-caritramu,* written when he was still young (now lost); *Śāli-vāhana-sapta-śati,* also lost, composed "when his mustache was just starting to grow" (*nūnūgu mīsāla nūtna-yauvanamuna*); then *Naiṣadhamu,* from the prime of his youth; *Bhīma-khaṇḍamu,* in maturity; and *Kāśī-khaṇḍamu,* "before he became too old" (*prāyam′ intaku migula kaivrālakuṇḍa, Kāśī-khaṇḍamu,* 1.7). Another no longer extant work is his *Paṇḍitârādhya-caritramu.* Many scholars believe the *Śiva-rātri-māhātmyamu* to be the poet's last work, partly because it is never mentioned in earlier verses like the one just cited. The popular tradition also ascribes to Śrīnātha various other works, including many *cāṭus* as well as written versions of the oral epics *Palnāṭi vīrula kathā* and *Kāṭamarāju kathā;* in the latter cases, Śrīnātha's name serves to provide a needed authority for materials emerging out of oral milieux.

In his colophon to *Naiṣadhamu,* the poet makes it clear that he has achieved the feat of translating Sanskrit *kāvya* into Telugu—apparently a first. All of his other surviving works produce *kāvya,* of a vigorous and sustained nature, out of *purāṇa* themes. These works are self-contained, complete poetic compositions, with an integrity of structure and theme. We have chosen two distinct samples: the story of Śiva's war against the Tripura demons, as told at the famous temple of Dakṣârāma, which received its *liṅga* as a result of this conflict (*Bhīma-khaṇḍamu*); and the detailed description of the pregnancy of Suśīla and the birth of her son, Sukumāra, the rogue-hero of the *Śiva-rātri-māhātmyamu,* along with the rituals associated with pregnancy and childbirth.

A DEFINITION OF POETRY[1]

A little crooked
like the crescent moon on Śiva's head,

sharp as the contours
of the firm, quickened breasts of the goddess
roused to fury at the end of time,

yet soft and delicious:

good poetry is all of this together,
dancing
wherever poets live.

1. Introduction to Śrīnātha, *Bhimeśvara-purāṇamu* (Madras: Ananda Press, 1901), 1.11–15.

Some poets become addicted: they write poems
as if their tongue is a stylus,
their mouth a blank palm leaf,
and whatever they know
is black ink stirred in the ink pot of their minds.[2]

Little wisdom,
much pride,
no tolerance,
endless jealousy:

self-styled scholars
and picayune sophists
live like frogs in a well.

When crows caw nearby,
grating on the ear,
what can the goose do?
Keep silent
or go away.

Seeing its diction, some say it's tough as Sanskrit.
Hearing the idiom, others say it's Telugu.
Let them say what they want. I couldn't care less.
My poetry is the true language of this land.[3]

BURNING THE THREE CITIES[4]

They had lost the essence of eternity, so all the gods' enemies
looked depressed. Flying through the sky
to where they were huddled together, Nārada spoke to them
in encouraging tones.

"Why grieve if a begging bowl,
filled with eternity,
was lost to the gods? Ask Śiva
to protect you, the birthless god,

2. Although modern editors class this verse as *ku-kavi-ninda,* the usual reproach directed at poor poets, the texture of the verse is ambiguous: it is possible that Śrīnātha is speaking positively about prolific oral poets, seen in the light of an extended metaphor about writing down or recording.

3. *Karṇāṭa-bhāṣa,* literally, "the language of Karṇāṭa," the extended region that, for Śrīnātha, includes the area of Telugu speech.

4. *Bhīma-khaṇḍamu,* 4.99–111, 113, 119, 122–51.

lord in Dakṣârāma, with the world
in his stomach and half a moon on his head."

They heard his words and went to Dakṣârāma
to serve the Fierce God,[5] lord of the world,
and so they grew strong.

With all who lived in the Three Cities,
hating the gods, they heated up the world
with their inner fire.[6] They took to the Pāśupata path
with strong minds and a whole heart as they worshiped
the incomparable Śiva, the first Fierce God.

At dawn they brought him golden flowers from the river in the sky.
At sunrise they perfumed him with smoking incense.
At mid-morning they covered him with cool camphor paste mixed with saffron.
For lunch they served him sweet rice with milk pudding, cakes, curd, and fruit.
At sunset they pleased him with drums, conches, cymbals,
and at midnight, with the soft tones of the lute.

After serving the Fierce God, who gives whatever is asked, they received as his gift an everlasting, energetic, extraordinary power.

This intoxicated them: they took over all beings and tormented the gods for no good reason other than their fearless, unfettered sense of excess.

Indra's diamond weapon lost its edge.
The blinding flames of the fire god died down to smoldering coals.
The god of death felt his terrible club turn light as cork.
Varuṇa's strangling noose went soft, like an ordinary rope.
The wind abated. The god of wealth was deflated.
The planets were constricted when, through the power of time,
these demons grew strong with the blessing of the Fierce God.

At that point, Viṣṇu and Brahmā, tormented by the antigods, contemplated a way out. They mounted their golden-winged eagle and regal goose, respectively, and approached the Enemy of Desire,[7] Son-in-law of the Snow Mountain, in his home at Dakṣârāma on the shores of the southern sea. They threw themselves full length on the ground at his feet, chanted mantras, and praised him for the sake of the world:

5. Bhīmanāyaka or Bhīmeśvara, Śiva at Dakṣârāma.
6. *Tapas.*
7. Śiva, destroyer of Manmatha.

"Hear us, lord delighting in Dakṣârāma
on the shore of the Seven Rivers.[8]
You saved us from the flames of deadly poison.[9]
Fierce God, compassionate lord—we have been weakened
by the depredations of the demons from the Three Cities.
We are in deep distress, with no one to help us. You help
the helpless: first you took care of them, then of us,
then of them again. Now it's our turn. You know
what's fair.

You put out the poisonous inferno. You are the Deathless *Liṅga*
that emerged from the ocean of milk. We have come to you,
unborn Fierce God at Dakṣârāma.

You are crowned by the syllable Om, and covered with snakes.
Sun, moon, and fire are your three eyes. Your bracelets
are serpents, Desire your defeated foe. Your gifts
are magical, your feet our final refuge.[10]

God with burning eyes:
  save us from the terrible Three Cities.
You swim in the flooding love of the goddess:
  save us from the terrible Three Cities.
Perfect in purity and entirely one:
  save us from the terrible Three Cities.
With scorching weapons in all your hands,
  save us from the terrible Three Cities.
We have no one else, Fierce God,
  to save us from the terrible Three Cities.

They are lording it over all three worlds
by force of arms with no impediment.
Their cities move at will, with an ominous buzz.
They have turned us into bonded slaves. If you delay
any longer, we won't survive.

Have mercy, lord of Dakṣârāma, Fierce God draped
in snakes: whether it's poison-fire or the Three Cities,
the world is equally
at risk."

8. Saptagodāvari, the seven-branched river at Dakṣârāma.

9. The black Kālakūṭa poison that arose from the ocean of milk when the gods and demons churned it to produce the elixir of immortality.

10. Omitting v. 112 and abridging the following *stotra*.

Śiva, praised in this manner by Brahmā and Viṣṇu, by Indra and other gods, was immensely pleased. The Protector of the World, the Fierce God who emerged out of the inner sphere of the seven netherworlds as a self-born, self-luminous *liṅga*, abandoned that unthinkable, unconditioned, unblemished form and took on another wholly radiant, visible one: an unruly mass of hair, yellow and red like brass and *kusumbha* flowers; a string of Brahmā's skulls, white as a garland of lotus buds or a two-headed snake; serpent earrings reflected in the sheen of his cheeks, lit by a smile; a dark elephant's skin dripping fresh blood, like a dark cloud streaked with red from the setting sun; ink-black poison in his neck, as if it were musk smeared as makeup on an actor in love with the goddess Earth, his newfound heroine; a body white as jasmine flowers unfolding as evening comes; a golden crown, like a golden pot filled with Ganges water, which he had placed there just in case his scorching third eye would flare up again and spark off a violent conflagration in his hair whenever he blinked, since he was still hot and angry after burning up the impudent god of desire; subtle glimmerings of moonlight continuously flashing upon him, as if broken pieces of the moon were gathered there; a playful fawn that was trying to jump up into the sky after bracing itself with its hooves against his thumb, red as lotus. He extended his hand, red with the fragrant saffron which he had smeared on Pārvatī's breasts and as potent as the jewel that can absorb the most terrible poison,[11] and reassured them with his resonant voice, deep as thunder from a monsoon cloud:

"Lotus-born Brahmā, eagle-borne Viṣṇu, Indra of the thousand eyes,
and all other gods: I've been thinking for some time
about the troubles you are having. I am ready to destroy
the arrogant antigods. Get ready
for war."

The lord of Dakṣârāma, emperor of the gods,
foe to Desire and to Darkness,
thought for a brief moment
about the best way to conquer
his enemies' cities.

At once, he gave a sign and a command:

The earth with its surrounding oceans became a chariot.
Sun and moon were its wheels, Brahmā its driver.
The four Vedas were four horses, goaded on by the syllable Om,
the driver's whip. The starry skies became a standard.
The jewel-studded mountain became a bow, and the bowstring

11. The folk belief is that the jewel in a cobra's hood serves as an antidote to snake poison.

was the Serpent King. Viṣṇu, married to the Ocean's daughter,
turned himself into an arrow: the seven winds were its feathers,
its tip was fashioned from the doomsday flames,
and it was greased with saffron paste from Lakṣmi's breasts.

When all the instruments were ready, the Fierce God, a feast for the eyes,
climbed onto that chariot in Dakṣârāma.

Gogulamma,[12] with the Seven Mothers, sprinkled him
with turmeric rice. Pātāla Bhairava controlled the crowds
with his golden cane. Flowers rained down from heaven
to the thunderous drumming of the gods. Millions
of sages folded their hands on their foreheads and wished him
victory, as the Fierce God, bent on demolishing
the three cities with his mountain-bow, mounted the chariot
made from fertile Earth.

Like a filament of silver pulled through the hole in a goldsmith's plate,[13]
the long body was pulled taut.
Inside it, bones squeaked and snapped and cracked.
The outer skin split open like peeling garlic.
Huge spreading hoods turned bright red like tender buds

when Black-Throat Śiva bent back the tip of the golden mountain
that was his bow, and strung it
with the great snake.

The three-eyed god strung the bow, stretching
the serpent as its string, with the same hand that fondles
Pārvatī's taut breasts.

As he twanged the serpent string
tied to the golden mountain, space
exploded in sound.

Casually, God played with the resonant bowstring
firmly tied to the bow, and the wheel of the world
spun dizzily round and round. The netherworld
shook, the spacious sky broke into pieces.
Whole universes splintered and fell.

When Śiva bent the two ends of the bow until they touched,
gods and serpents, at either end, came together, and each
asked the other: "How are you?"

12. A folk goddess at Dakṣârāma.
13. The goldsmith's plate has holes of various sizes for shaping metal strings.

As he kept stretching the bow, the serpent's faces
shook violently and coughed up fiery poison
and rising smoke.

Poisonous flames leaping from the nostrils of the snake
when he exhaled spread outward from the bow
in the hands of the god.

The snake's many mouths spit fire as the god's powerful arms
stretched the bow, gutting all three worlds.

As he pulled the bow, two fingers clenched
by the thumb, flames flared amidst poisonous fumes
from the snake's vast hoods.

In this way the Fierce God began his work of destruction: he stretched the bow that was the Golden Mountain with the violent force of his arms until the ends made a circle. Under the strain of that stretching, the Serpent King vomited poison from all his thousand hoods. The poisoned tongues of black flame leaping from the snake's nostrils flickered like the Hālāhala poison that emerged when the ocean was churned.[14] Lest these flames engulf the universe, the god shook his head wildly, showering Ganges water, and sprinkled moonbeams from his left eye. Disaster was averted. Now, with Durga's help and the blessings of Gaṇapati, he looked at the Three Cities—those uneven targets—and made Viṣṇu, the First and Ancient God, Puruṣottama, into an arrow. Invoking the Ṕāśupata weapon with chants, he pulled the bowstring back to his ear, almost burning it with the fire of his third eye. With a terrible roar and a violent laugh, he released the shot.

That great weapon

Grabs their tender hands.
Hugs their hips.
Fingers their smooth cheeks.
Toys with their earrings.
Fondles their round breasts.
Tickles their belly buttons.
Runs through their long hair.
Reaches for their lips.
Shot by God, the arrow of fire
shamelessly enters
the women of the Three Cities

14. The episode describing the churning of the ocean by the gods and antigods immediately precedes this episode in *Bhīma-khaṇḍamu*.

like a hungry lover whose passion
ends in peace.

The iron houses in the Three Cities
melted down in the flames of Śiva's arrows,
until only huge lumps were left.

Burnt to ashes
were walls and towers and pavements.
Lotuses floating in the ponds became soot.
The inner courts of the great palaces went up in flames.
Gardens rich in wind-blown pollen turned to dust

in the Three Cities, when Black-Throat Śiva fired the arrow that was
Viṣṇu
from the Mountain-bow, bent round as a circle.

When the Three Cities were incinerated
by God's arrow, one thing remained unburnt—
the single *liṅga* that ends all time.

That *liṅga* held up the skies like the very first *liṅga*.
When the Three Cities exploded in flames, it remained
untouched by fire,

covered with flowers unfading
that enemies had picked and offered
from the all-giving trees.
Viṣṇu, the burning arrow,
wove fresh patterns, red and yellow,
of sandalpaste and saffron
on the body of the god.

In this way the Fierce God rode his chariot Earth with the four Vedas as its horses, sun and moon as its wheels, and Brahmā as its charioteer. He placed the arrow that was Viṣṇu on the bowstring that was the great serpent, tied to the Golden Mountain bow, and burned the Three Cities. He stood victorious, full of joy, sung by the musicians of the gods.

He danced—a wild playing, to the pounding of the drums
and the roar of rolling waves as the river in his hair
splashed through the hollow of the skulls
hanging from his neck.[15]

15. Reading, with Gundavarapau Laksmi Narayana, *jūṭāvī-kroḍā-ghāṭa-karoṭi-kotara-kulī-koṭi-*.

When the beating of the drums, violent laughter,
and the explosion of the dance
all fused together, and the Mothers, demons,
Bhairava, the ghouls and witches
sang his praise, God himself
was amazed.

Then he unstrung the great bow fashioned from the Golden Mountain and put it down. He sent the snake back to work holding up the earth, and Viṣṇu back to the ocean of milk. He dismissed the gods and sent Brahmā to his world. He mixed the Vedas back into his own breathing and ordered the sun and moon to measure time. His work was finished. The remarkable *liṅga* that was the family deity of the Three City antigods he cut into five pieces, because it was made up of five Brahmās, five syllables, five essences, and the five elements. One became Amarârāma, since it was set up by Amareṭvara-Indra in the village called Dharaṇālakota on the bank of the Kṛṣṇaveṇi River. The second was Somârāma, established by Soma—the Moon—in the village of Guṇapūḍi on the south bank of the Gautami River.[16] The third was Kṣīrârāma, established by Rāmacandra in the village of Pālakoṭa.[17] The fourth was Bhīmârāma with the Kumāra-bhīma-liṅga established by Kumārasvāmi, Śiva's son, in the village of Cāḷukyabhīmavara, the capital of the Cāḷukya dynasty.[18] The fifth was Dakṣârāma, the place of Śiva's first father-in-law, Dakṣa Prajāpati. That is where Śiva himself lives. He caused all of these *liṅgas* to be set up as the Five Ārāmas, all of them offering both pleasure and release. But Śiva's favorite place of residence is the pure crystal *liṅga* who is the Fierce God, bathed in moonlight radiating from the eyes of heavenly women, at Dakṣavāṭa on the shore of the sea.

This is the story of how the Three Cities were defeated. Those who hear it, recite it, record it, ask for it, or teach it will be free of all evil and will acquire good life and release—and all good things.

THE BIRTH OF SUKUMĀRA[19]

[The Brahmin minister Yajñadatta and his wife Suśīla were childless, until Śiva responded to Suśīla's worship:]

16. The Gautami is another name for the Godāvari (after it breaks apart into several branches). Somârāma is now known as Gunupūḍi (sic) Bhīmavaram, since the village of Gunupūḍi is encompassed within the town of Bhīmavaram (West Godavari District).

17. Now known as Pālakŏllu (also in West Godavari). *Pāla* means "milk," Sanskrit *kṣīra.*

18. Near Sāmarlakoṭa (East Godavari District).

19. *Śiva-rātri-māhātmyamu* (Hyderabad: Telugu University, 1995), 2.41–47, 50–72, 74–75.

By fasting, vows, gifts, and other acts of charity, and by worshiping the gods,
Suśīla was freed from obstacles: an embryo appeared in her womb, like
the moon reappearing in water.

Like the *śamī* tree, latent with fire,
or the earth with its hidden treasures,
or the celestial Ganges, with elephants deep inside,[20]
like twilight, that holds the moon,
like a mountain cave with a lion in it,
learning that carries humility,
sunlight that contains cloud,[21]
a good word full of truth,
like the lotus coming from God's navel with Brahmā in its folds,[22]
or the southern sky where Agastya[23] appears,

she bore that first child.

Her cheeks became thin. Like black bees
sitting on a yellow flower, her nipples
grew dark—just like the faces
of her jealous co-wives.

She delighted her husband's heart
with her face, pale from pregnancy,
pale as the *ketakī* that first blooms in the rainy season
when a cool wind comes from the east.

Heavy with child, she could not bear
the weight of a flower on her ear—
to say nothing of gold necklaces,
jeweled pendants, armlets, and anklets.

The days she would swing in the garden
now seemed like stories of long ago,
though her feet itched when she heard
that her friends were playing in the hills.

Used to embracing her with passion,[24]
her husband now very carefully
reached for her lips as they lay in bed
and kissed her eagerly, savoring

20. The elephants of the eight cardinal points wash in the Ganges.
21. The sun absorbs the water that generates clouds. Cf. *Raghuvaṃśa* 1.18.
22. Brahmā sits on a lotus that emerges from Viṣṇu's navel.
23. Canopus.
24. Reading *manniñcu* for the printed *manniñci*.

the new flavor of fresh earth
that she loved to eat.[25]

Day by day, her pregnancy advanced,
to everyone's delight—though she was
getting tired. Yawn followed yawn,
her eyes grew languid and unsteady.
From time to time she was reminded
of the fatigue she used to get
from making love on top.

She moved slowly, heavy
with the child, like a rain cloud
that has the drunk the waters of the sea
just before the monsoon.

The minister performed, with his king's blessings,
the rites of parting the mother's hair[26]
and producing a male,[27] while all tributary kings
brought gifts of love—women, gold, horses, jewels.

All over the town, the king's servants
sprinkled fragrant water on the streets,
plastered walls with fresh musk,
decorated thresholds with camphor designs,
hung garlands on the gateways
with banana plants on either side,
draped silk on top,
set up flagpoles graced with lilies and sandalpaste,
painted crocodiles and other lucky signs on houses—
all for Yajñadatta's first celebration.

Karṇāṭaka women from beyond the mountain passes[28]
danced through the streets as they sang,
with a full throat, festive songs[29]
based on the fifth note, as the cuckoo sings.

25. Pregnant women are thought to have a craving for earth (a condition known elsewhere as pica).

26. *Sīmantonnayana,* to protect the pregnancy—the pregnant mother's hair is parted with a porcupine quill.

27. *Puṃsavana.*

28. The story takes place in a city called Ratnapura in the middle of the Daṇḍaka Forest, very near the Vindhya mountains. Cf. Vinukoṇḍa Vallabharāya, *Krīdâbhirāmamu* (Madras: M. Sesacalam and Co., 1972), 101.

29. *Pañjaḷa* and *dhavaḷa prabandha (gīti)*—distinct genres of song.

At just the right moment, dancers arrived
from the five great shrines of Andhra[30]
along with women from heaven,
pearls dancing on their breasts,
lilies in their hair,
earrings bouncing off their cheeks
as they rushed.

One woman set up pots for worship on the four corners of a raised platform. Another planted seeds of the nine grains in separate bowls and sprinkled them with water. Someone else rolled a pestle across the mortar decked with a banyan branch. Yet another spread purified cloth over flat stools, hiding their legs. Three others held fans—made of yak hair, of palm leaves, and of cloth—while one more held a golden box of betel leaves.

A Brahmin, sitting on the officiant's seat, had the minister offer two oblations into the fire, as the Gṛhya books prescribe—beginning with chants from the three Vedic texts, and ending with chants of victory.[31]

Wisps of smoke played with this pregnant woman—

black lotuses to adorn her ears,
fresh aloe designs on her cheeks,
fragrant musk all over her body—

as butter poured into the fire.

Her girlfriends watched, alight with smiles.
The priests were chanting. Her breasts were tingling,
her face luminous as the autumn moon,
as her husband lifted his hand and gently parted her hair
with a porcupine's quill.

Into her right nostril
he dripped three drops squeezed
from banyan leaves and fruit,
as his bracelets chimed.

Three new garlands adorned her breasts,
one of soft wheat grains, interwoven
with silk tassels of many colors,
and another of flowers with a snake's head
on either end, perfectly suited
to her necklace of gold.

30. The *pañcârāmas*. See translation on pp. 119–27 from Śrīnātha's *Bhīma-khaṇḍamu*.
31. *Jayâdihoma*.

Her brothers brought gifts from home.
Thousands of other relatives gave other presents.
The king gave her clothes to wear, to delight the eye,
and neighboring kings made rich offerings.

Horses' hooves covered the whole earth, and space itself
was crowded with elephants. The sky was filled
with parasols, the wind with fragrance.
Royal servants attended to a host of Brahmins.
The world echoed with cries of success.
Sunlight flashed from a thousand jewels.
Joy quickened every heart

when the King of the Vindhya Mountain
came together with his queen,
to conduct the ceremonies at his minister's home.

A woman with flowers in her greying hair
mounted the platform and, carefully putting aside
the special thread the minister put on for this ritual,
smiling, smeared turmeric
over the thread he always wore.

The minister gave a magnificent feast
for the whole town, the entire country, and everyone agreed:
"Daśaratha's *vājapeya* feast, or Yudhiṣṭhira's coronation,[32]
were nothing compared to this."

After a full nine months,
at an hour sweet with goodness[33]
when the moon and its star, the sun,
Jupiter, Venus, and Rāhu
were exalted, the white-eyed mother
gave birth to a son.

A servant from the inner quarters rushed to inform the minister that Suśīla had given birth to a son. Her words flooded his heart with delicious feeling. His whole body thrilling, a soft smile on his face,

he gave that woman the silk clothes he was wearing,
and the ornaments upon his body
as her reward.

32. Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya* sacrifice is described in *Mahābhārata* 2. Daśaratha, Rāma's father, performed a great sacrifice to have a son.

33. Each day has several *amṛta-ghaṭikas,* auspicious hours.

In the birth chamber, still impure from the birth,
the women were busy: putting a pot with white marks
at the head of the bed, drawing designs from white ashes,
sprinkling white mustard, preparing offerings,
mixing salt with neem leaves, setting up a fresh bed
out of rattan, burning buffalo horn,[34]
blessing, applying sandal and oil,
cooking the *kāyamu* balls[35] for the new mother,
singing and making jokes.

One woman slapped on the wall a mixture of camphor and sandal.
Another held a frog upside down outside the birth chamber.
Wearing a yellow sari, a woman worshiped the goddess of poverty.[36]
With fresh paint of lime and turmeric, a lovely girl drew the sun and the moon on cloth.
Another draped an aging ram with a snakelike garland, a head on either end.
One sprinkled ghee. One set fire to a snake's discarded skin.[37]

Lying on his cot in the birth chamber,
lit by lamps that were jewels,
the baby, a newborn god of love,
was the moon in the evening sky
served by brilliant stars and planets.

The minister entered the chamber after giving gifts to Brahmins.
Touching water and fire, he saw the face of his first son.

When the time of impurity was over,[38]
he performed the ritual that created a good day
and, after honoring the household gods,
gave his beautiful son a name—Sukumāra.

[This Sukumāra, for all the promise of his birth, later grows up to become a debauched profligate, carnivorous and alcoholic, who eventually makes love to an Untouchable woman in her period, then fathers daughters with her and seduces them. He is ultimately saved by an accidental act of devotion to Śiva while spending Śivarātri night in a temple.]

34. The following phrase, *mañci muṭṭ'ĕḍada yojiñcuvāru,* is obscure.

35. A concoction of pepper and other ingredients that recently delivered mothers ate each day after the birth.

36. The inauspicious and threatening Jyeṣṭhādevi, the elder sister of Lakṣmi, was worshiped to avert her influence over the baby.

37. All the above acts are intended to protect the mother and child from evil.

38. Usually eleven days.

NINE

Bamměra Potana

First half of fifteenth century

Despite the existence of a large body of legendary material about Potana, factual information about him is extremely sparse. From his colophons we know the names of his parents, Kesana and Akkasān′amma; his ancestral village, Bamměra, is in northern Tĕlaṅgāṇa, near Warangal. His masterpiece is the (unfinished) Telugu *Mahābhāgavatamu,* a landmark in the evolution of Andhra Vaiṣṇava religion. Portions of this work were completed after the poet's death by Vĕligandala Nārayya (books 11 and 12, and perhaps part of book 2 as well), Ercūri Siṅganna (book 6), and Bŏpparaju Gaṅgayya (book 5).

In explanation of this textual situation, the tradition insists that Potana refused to dedicate his book to the local king, Sarvajña Siṅgabhūpāla; the king then ordered the manuscript buried. The god appeared to the queen and ordered her to redeem the book, but when it was retrieved from the earth, whole portions were found to have been ruined.[1] The story is mentioned in 1756 by Kūcimañci Timmakavi in his *Sarva-lakṣaṇa-sāra-saṅgrahamu.* Its rationale may, in part, derive from the existence in the text of deviations from courtly norms of meter; there is thus an attempt to free Potana from responsibility for these "mistakes." Even earlier, in the seventeenth century, Appakavi implicitly attacked Potana for confusing the two homophonous sounds, *r* and *r̲*.[2] But Potana refers to himself as a *sahaja-kavi,* "a poet by nature or birth," as opposed to a trained, erudite author. The title reflects Potana's desire to distinguish himself from his courtly predecessors and contemporaries and to proclaim a separate set of standards, keyed to his

1. Another version has it that Potana himself hid the book in the temple, and when it was later recovered, portions were missing because of the depredations of white ants.

2. Appakavi, *Appakavīyamu* (Madras: Vavilla Ramasvamisastrulu and Sons, 1966), 3.344.

experience of god. Indeed, the text is an embodiment of intense, fluent emotion, which spills over the classical constraints of form. It is this same intensity that requires the elevation of the text to a status of divinity—a status always marked, in South Indian metapoetic narratives, by a claim that the text was somehow lost, damaged, or impaired, and then miraculously recovered, although almost never in full.

Another attempt to distinguish Potana from the courtly poets, is the legend that identifies the great Śrīnātha as his rich brother-in-law. Śrīnātha dedicated his books to kings and other wealthy patrons and was rewarded by them; Potana supposedly remained a poor farmer, refusing contact with such (human) lords. The opposition is worked out in several striking stories. In one, Potana sings of the moment when Viṣṇu rushes—without his usual weapons or attributes—to save the elephant Gajendra, who has called on God for help. Śrīnātha supposedly mocked this passage: how could the god not have the presence of mind to arm himself with the minimal necessities to save his devotee from the clutches of a devouring crocodile? When the two poet brothers-in-law were having lunch one day, a cry was heard to the effect that Śrīnātha's son had fallen into a well. The learned poet rushed off to the well without even washing his hands. When it soon transpired that this was a false alarm, Potana drew the obvious lesson, taunting Śrīnātha: "Where are the ropes and ladders? Why have you hurried here with bare hands? How were you going to save your son?"

In Potana, immediacy of feeling counts for everything. This flow of feeling is itself seen as divine: the poet disclaims authorship and attributes his poetry to the god.

> *palikĕḍidi bhāgavatam′ aṭa palikiñceḍivāḍu rāma-bhadruṇḍ′ aṭa ne/*
> *palikina bhava-haram′ agun′ aṭa palikĕda ver′ ŏṇḍu gātha palukagan elā//*
>
> What I have to sing
> is the story of God.
> The one who makes me sing it
> is God himself.
> If I sing it, I'll become free.
> I'll sing it: why sing
> any other tale? [1.16]

Thus in the course of composing his *Gajendra-mokṣa* section, Potana became stuck at a critical moment—just before the god's intervention to save the elephant (this is the verse beginning "Far away in heaven" in the second section translated below, on pp. 143–46). He went out for a walk. In his absence, God himself entered the house in Potana's form and wrote down the rest of the verse, while Potana's daughter was watching. When the poet returned and found the verse completed, he asked his daughter who had written it. "You did it yourself," she replied.

Potana is also the author of a Śaiva work, *Vīrabhadra-vijayamu,* and a poem praising a courtesan, *Bhoginī-daṇḍakamu;* the latter work is dedicated to the same king, Sarvajña Siṅgabhūpāla, whose claim on Potana's devotional poetry was denied by the poet. It is his *Bhāgavatamu,* however, that remains the most widely copied and the most frequently read and performed text in Telugu, its verses learned by heart by many.

VIṢṆU THE DWARF[3]

[Viṣṇu comes as a dwarf to the sacrificial site of the demon king Bali, who was dispensing gifts during an *aśvamedha,* and greets him:]

"You are king of the world of demons. Your word
is command in all worlds. A smile from you
can kill the king of the gods. At a stroke
you can make widows of their women. Noble
in speech, you attend this rite that sages commend.
My blessings to you."

It was as if the Vedas themselves had taken human form.
He was not crooked, but rather complex.
He carried a parasol and a Brahmin's staff.
A begging bowl hung from his shoulder.
A water pot in his hand.
His presence lit up space.
He was like an actor playing with words.
Śukra[4] saw him, this Brahmin boy,
and turned his face away, uninterested,
a planet dimmed by the sun.
Bali,[5] however, bowed to him and seated him on his throne.
He washed and dried his feet, as his wife poured water from a golden bowl.

The king asked his guest:

"Where are you from, young boy,
and what is your name?
Where do you live?

3. Potana, *Āndhra-mahābhāgavatamu* (Hyderabad: Andhra Pradesh Sahitya Akademi, 1977), 8.545–46, 548–73, 575, 577–96, 599–604, 606–10, 619–20.

4. The guru of the antigods.

5. The syntax is scrambled here; we have separated out the two conflicting subjects, Śukra and Bali.

Now that you have come, my life
has meaning. I am happy.
The ritual will work.
I'm at the end of my desires, and the fires
are well-fed. Time itself
has turned creative.

Food, clothes, or women,
cash, diamonds, gold,
fruit, or wild honey,
cows, horses, elephants, chariots,
houses, whole villages, a piece of the earth:
just ask for any of them,
or anything else."

So he spoke, as it was right for him to do, and the god, pleased, replied:

"How can I say I belong to this place or that place?
I live everywhere.
How can I say I am his or hers?
I am me. I walk alone.
How can I say this is my path?
I go all three ways.[6]
No need to say I know this or that.
I know everything.
No one is kin to me. I belong to everyone.
I'm alone, with no family,
though the goddess of wealth[7] was once mine.
I'll tell you where you can find me—
wherever good people are.

As for you, you spoke well, like a good king.
Your family is kind, truthful.
They're not afraid of giving battle, or gifts,
as the case may be—
to warriors, or to Brahmins.
In fact, they're addicted to giving.
Your people were great heroes.
Prahlāda,[8] your grandfather,

6. The three times?

7. Lakṣmi, the god's consort (but also "wealth" itself).

8. Prahlāda, son of Hiraṇyakaśipu, was a devotee of Viṣṇu. Here his presence in the genealogy provides the family with fame, seen as moon-white in relation to the ocean at full tide.

rose like a moon over the ocean
of your family.

Your great-granduncle, Hiraṇyâkṣa, conquered the whole world. He roamed the earth with his club in search of someone capable of fighting him. That is when Viṣṇu, in the form of a boar, killed him. His brother, Hiraṇyakaśipu, came to know of this and was amazed at Viṣṇu's valor. Straightaway he sought out Viṣṇu in his house, mocking his strength.

He came at him with a spear,
like deadly Time,
and Viṣṇu, who knew time,
true to his nature, played a game:

'I can't win a straight fight.
If I turn away, he will come at me
sure as death.' So he made himself small,
slipped into the demon's nose,
and sat in his heart.
He was afraid.

Hiraṇyakaśipu went to the temple.
The god was not there.
He went to the sky, the earth, to heaven, in all directions.
He looked into every hole on earth, checked the ocean, all cities and
forests, the Netherworld. His enemy was nowhere to be seen.
He stopped searching.

'Maybe he died. If not, I would have found him.
No point in hating the dead.
Death should be the end of enmity.'[9]

That was your great-grandfather. He had many fine qualities. Let them be.

Your father[10] gave his life
to the gods when they begged him.
And you're just like him.

9. Viṣṇu—seeking somewhat ironically, and very precisely, for a way to praise his would-be patron—stops the story at this point, *before* Hiraṇyakaśipu's destruction by Viṣṇu's own Man-Lion form. One can hear in this passage a pointed commentary on the relations of poets and their patrons.

10. Virocana.

You rule the worlds.
You have driven the gods from heaven.
You take delight in giving.
You're good at protecting your people.

Moreover, if you have a kingdom
but don't give to beggars and Brahmins,
what good is the kingdom? What good is life?

When people talk of great givers,
your name is at the top.
But all these days
I never came to ask.

I'm single. I don't need much.
Just two or three feet
of land. That will be enough.
I'll reach the zenith of my desire."

He was the Ultimate Beggar, and the eager donor now said:

"You have spoken well—
wise and true.
But you have asked for so little.
Have a little thought.
The giver is a king.

What have you asked for? A piece of earth?
Don't you want any elephants?
How about some horses?
Take a look at these pretty girls.
You're a child. You don't know how to ask.
But so it goes. Still, how can I,
king that I am, give you
so little?"

A knowing smile played on the boy's lips as he replied:

"An umbrella, a thread, a water pot, a stick to lean on—
these are the things I need. I'm a bachelor.
Why do I need land? Or elephants, or horses,
or girls? I have my rituals to perform.
Just give me these three feet.
That is all
I ask.[11]

11. *Mad-ākānkṣāmitambaina* . . . is a pun, meaning either "endless desire" or "limited desire," depending on whether we read *-amitambaina* or *-mitambaina.*

Don't say no.
It means the world to me.

Long, very long, is the chain of desire.
It has no end. Even the ancient kings
who owned the earth, up to the oceans,
were still unsatisfied. Did they ever learn
to go beyond desire? Did they see an end to it?"

The boy finished speaking, and now, as Bali was about to pour the water that would mark the gift, Śukra, whose advice sustained the kingdom, said:

"My lord, this boy is not a Brahmin.
He is Viṣṇu, the inexhaustible,
born as a son of Kaśyapa and Aditi.
You promised him a gift without knowing
who he is. This is disaster for the dynasty of Diti.[12]
He'll steal your wealth, your kingdom, your home, your power
and give them to Indra. He will swell up and fill
the entire universe with his three steps.
After you've lost everything to Viṣṇu,
how will you survive?

One step for the earth,
a second for the sky: with his huge body
he will cover all space.
It will be so tight, there will be no room left over.
Where will you go?

If you break your promise to give,
you go to hell—but you are strong enough
to deny this. A gift that brings ruin
is no gift. Charity, sacrifice, meditation, and ritual—
you need cash for all of them.
Divide your wealth into five parts,
one for pleasure, one for profit, one for religion,
one for fame, and the rest for charity
to those who ask. Then you will have
both this world and the next. You can't give,
losing yourself.

There's also an ancient chant that speaks of this. Listen carefully:

12. Mother of the antigods.

‘If you lose everything when you say yes, it’s no lie to say no.
The tree of life is rooted in untruth.[13]
Such a tree will never die.
It puts out true flowers and fruits.
If you kill untruth, truth will die.
A tree grows through its roots.
A man who gives without loss,
without pain or smallness—
he will prosper.
If you pride yourself on truth
and give all you have,
you’ll have nothing.

He asked for everything.
He’s lying that he has not.
He’s contemptible. What else can I say?
Treat him as a living corpse.

And one more thing:

When it comes to women and marriages,
or when your honor, your money, or your life
is at risk, or to save cows and Brahmins,
you can tell a lie and it’s no sin.

Save your family, your kingdom, your power.
This dwarf can swallow the earth.
He won’t settle for a little. He’ll fill the worlds
with his three steps. Is there anyone to stop him?
Pay attention to my words: no gift, no nothing.
Tell him to go.”

Bali closed his eyes for just a moment:

“What you have said is right, my teacher.
This is the way a householder should go.
But I promised to give him anything he asked—
profit, pleasure, fame, or livelihood.
How can I take it back because of my need?
There is nothing worse than breaking one’s word.
The Earth herself said to Brahmā
she could bear anyone except a liar.

13. *Aṇṭa*—the unformed domain of potential, as opposed to the fully formed, objectified domain of *satya*. Śukra seems to be distinguishing truth from factuality.

People of honor have but two courses:
never run away from battle, and never
tell a lie.

It's rare for a farmer to have good seeds and good land.
It's rare for a giver to have the right person to receive.

There were kings before, with vast kingdoms.
Proud, too. Where are they?
Did they take their wealth with them?
We don't even know their names.
The ones we remember are Śibi[14] and others,
who gave everything.

That fullness that can't be seen
by rites or prayers
makes itself small as a little boy
and begs from me. Shouldn't I give him
what he asks?

That hand of his that plays with Lakṣmi's hair,
that strokes her body, her dress, her feet,
her cheeks, her breasts, and is more beautiful
at every spot—that hand is now stretched out to me,
and mine will be above it. That is what's good.
These kingdoms come and go, and my body
will not last.

I may go to hell, or go to jail. The world
may go to pieces. I may die a horrible death.
My family could be destroyed. Let it be. Come what may,
I'll keep my word to this person,
even if he is Śiva or Viṣṇu or Brahmā,
or whoever he may be.

If I give what I said, not wriggling out,
why should Viṣṇu bind me? And if he does,
he will himself release me in his kindness.
And if he doesn't, that's all right too.

Let the mountains turn upside down,
the oceans dry up; let the earth turn to dust,
the stars stop, but I'll still give.

14. Śibi offered his own body to Indra in place of a dove pursued by the latter.

He's never asked anyone before.
He's all alone. No father, no mother, no brothers.
And he knows everything.
I don't have the heart to say no
to this little fellow, who stands before me
stretching out his hands."

The king was determined to keep his word, and eager to give the gift. His heart was firm. Śukra looked at him in anger and cursed him: "Because you disobey my orders, you will quickly lose your kingdom." Though burned by his teacher's curse, Bali was set on truth.

Now his queen, Vindhyāvaḷi,
read her husband's signs
and brought a golden pot of water
to wash the boy's feet.

And the king called to him: "Come, young boy. I want to give you what you asked. Let me wash your feet." As Bali bowed to him with folded hands, the god stretched out his foot—the foot that gives gods what they seek, fragrant with musk from Lakṣmi's forehead, the anklets ringing Vedic song. The king washed first his right, then his left foot, and sprinkled that pure water on his own head. Sipping water, he announced his intention with reference to time and space.

"On this Brahmin, who has taken his vows
in the very form of Viṣṇu,
who knows the Veda is proof, to you
I bestow three feet of land."[15]
He stretched out his hand,
eager in the deed, and poured the water
as he chanted, "May God be pleased."
The world was stunned.

Śukra made one last effort to stop it.
He tried to block the water pot's spout.
Viṣṇu pushed in a blade of *kuśa* grass
and blinded his guru in one eye.

And the wide-eyed god took this water in his hand as if it were the tears that would soon flow from the eyes of the demon's wives.

Taking it,

15. These lines are in Sanskrit.

the dwarf grew bigger and bigger,
more and more, higher than the sky,
farther than the farthest clouds,
past the sun, past the moon,
beyond the pole star, the other worlds,
all the way to the seventh,
filling all the space there is.

THE RESCUE OF GAJENDRA[16]

[At some points Potana leaves his original far behind. One of the most beloved passages in his work occurs at the end of the famous myth of Viṣṇu's rescue of the elephant Gajendra, who has been fighting a losing battle with a crocodile in a pond of lotuses in South India. The struggle has gone on for thousands of years until Gajendra, in despair, cries out to Viṣṇu for help. Potana first offers a new version of this desperate call for help: here Gajendra, in effect, forces the god to appear by uttering a series of riddle-like, doubting verses that put into question the reality of the god's commitment to his devotees.

Viṣṇu, hearing this voice from the depths, rushes off to save the elephant—at the same time leaving his wife, Lakṣmi, in an embarrassing situation of erotic distress. There is no parallel to this description, in its imaginative intensity and erotic color, in any earlier version of the myth in the classical sources.

Gajendra speaks, in despair, still struggling with the crocodile:]

"They say He is there
for poor people.
They say He is there
where yogis live.
They say He's everywhere.
But is he or is he not?

I've lost my strength,
my courage. I'm dying.
My body is dead tired.
You're my only hope.
Save me. Come, lord.
Help me now.

16. Potana, 8.86, 90–91, 93–96, 98, 100, 102–3, 108–9, 118.

People say you hear them,
that you will go to impossible places
to help them,
that you answer their cry.
They say you see everything
there is to see.
Only I
have my doubts."

So he spoke, pleading that the lord who protects the unprotected would save him. He stretched his trunk toward the sky, sighing deeply as he scanned the horizon.

Brahmā on his lotus
and the other gods
heard his cry,
but they made no move.
They are *not*
all there is.

Viṣṇu who *is*
all that is
wished to come toward his devotee.

Far away in heaven,
in his private palace,
lying in bed with his wife
beside the lake at the edge of the garden,
he heard the elephant's cry
and rushed to go.

He didn't say a word to Śrī,
didn't reach for conch or discus,
didn't call to his servants
or harness his bird,
didn't straighten the long hair that fell, disheveled,
about his ears,
didn't even let go
of the end of his wife's sari
that he was holding as they quarreled.
He simply rushed out, racing
to save that elephant's life.

Lakṣmi ran after him,
and after her, the other wives,
and after them, Garuḍa,

and then his bow, his mace, his conch and wheel,
then Nārada, and the Commander,[17]
and, finally, everyone in heaven,
even cowherds and kids.

Lakṣmi was thinking:

"He didn't say where he was going:
did he hear the groans
of helpless women? Have thieves
made off with the Vedas?
Maybe the army of the demons
is marching against heaven.
Or some evil-minded people
have dared the believers
to show them God."

Her earrings were shaking,
her hair danced on her shoulders.
Her bodice came undone,
her belt[18] tore loose.
The dot on her forehead was smudged.
She held the top of her sari in her hands
as she ran, bright as a thousand moons,
her body staggering
under the weight of her breasts.

"I will ask him"—as she hurried forward.
"But will he answer?"—she drew back.
She was confused, troubled, slow
to take another step.

Moved only by the single purpose of saving the elephant's life, Viṣṇu, racing like thought, heedless of the other gods, soon caught sight of the lotus pond—looking, from above, like a ring of porpoises; or as if the stars Jupiter, Makara, the Crab, the Fish, and the Twins had infiltrated its depths; or like Kubera's store of treasures, some shaped like brilliant tortoises. Its waters, soaked with pollen, were like the good fortune of a lucky man, whose life achieves fulfillment; or you could think of it as Viṣṇu's heaven, home to the conch and discus and the Goddess; or perhaps this pool revealed the essential mode of our existence in its constant flow, its disturbing opposites locked in combat.

17. Viṣvaksena.
18. Reading *kāñci*.

Now Viṣṇu, flooded with compassion,
cut the crocodile to pieces
with his discus
that shook the world, sending off sparks
that dimmed the sun—
a weapon unimpeded
by anything in creation.

With his long arms, the god
lifted the elephant from the pond
and softly stroked his face
with his fingertips
to end his sorrow.

TEN

Annamayya

1424–1503

According to the hagiographical account written by his grandson, Cinnanna (Tiruveṅgaḷanāthuḍu), this singer of *padams* to Lord Veṅkaṭeśvara was born in Tāḷḷapāka in Cittūr District. As a young boy, he was already intoxicated with the god and made his way to his temple at Tirupati—a massive cultic complex spread over the Veṅkaṭam hills, today the outstanding pilgrimage site in South India. Although legend also connects Annamayya (also Annamâcārya) with the royal palace at Pĕnugŏṇḍa and the Vijayanagara king Sāḷuva Narasiṃha—whom the poet is said to have refused to praise in song—the poet must have lived most of his life in Tirupati. Tradition says he composed a poem each day for the god, producing a corpus of some 32,000 sung *padams*. Roughly half this number survive, engraved on copperplates during the lifetime of Annamayya's son and kept in the temple. Annamayya founded a family of poets who flourished in Tirupati for several generations and who created an entire literature centered on the Tirupati cult.

Annamayya's *padams* are addressed to the god, the Lord of the Hill, whom he imagines in a seemingly inexhaustible series of modes and moods, each moment unique and irreplaceable. The poems have been divided (after Annamayya's death) into the two categories of *śṛṅgāra,* "erotic," and *adhyātma,* "metaphysical." We might rephrase this slightly artificial distinction to include poems in which the poet sings to Veṅkaṭeśvara, out of his own knowledge of the god's love life and feelings, *about* this god, and those in which the poet sings about himself and about his relationship with and understanding of the god. In the first mode, the poet usually adopts the voice and persona of Veṅkaṭeśvara's wife, Padmāvati, or of one of his female lovers.

In contrast to the *kāvya* tradition in the high courtly style, Annamayya's diction is largely non-Sanskritized and idiomatic, reflecting spoken rhythms.

(There are, however, some *padam*s composed entirely in Sanskrit.) The poems are made to be sung as well as danced, as the musical component is central to their purpose. They have a standard form: an introductory line (*pallavi*) that serves as a refrain, syntactically completing each of the following three *caraṇam* stanzas. This format allows the theme, introduced initially, to deepen and exfoliate through each of the succeeding stanzas, often in unpredictable ways. In the "erotic" type, the poem ends with either a hint or an explicit statement of sexual fulfillment. Poems of this type reveal an exquisite sensitivity to the different states of loving, with particular empathy for the woman's feelings. The *adhyātma* poems embody a complementary playfulness as the poet explores all possible ways of reaching toward the god and of working upon the deity's emotions. This is a poetry that freely moves through intense subjectivity, strong sensual bodily feeling, and complex philosophical ideas: no boundary exists between physical experience, intellectual apprehension, and ordinary common sense. Although the poems may appear to be simple, they often carry a tone of extreme subtlety and sophistication born of introspection, erudition, and direct experience of the god.

SONGS FOR THE LORD OF THE HILLS

I[1]

You say you want to bathe
when the waves subside.
Where is there an end
to the endless mind?

You say, "Let me quench my thirst,
and then I'll find the truth."
You cannot quench your thirst.
How can you know truth?

Is there an end?

All the days you have a body,
longing does not cease.
You keep wanting things.
How can you find joy?

1. Annamayya, *Annamâcāryula kīrtanalu,* ed. Ponna Lilavatamma (Madras: Balasarasvati Book Deport, 1968), 61 [*kaḍal uḍipi*].

Is there an end?

You say, "Tell me what lies ahead,
and I'll forget what was before."
You cannot know what lies ahead.
How can you forget what was before?

Is there an end?

That goodness that comes of knowing
where to reach God—
you won't find it
even in dreams.

Is there an end?

II [2]

Life, day after day, is a game.
To find what you cannot see
is truth.

Coming is real. Going is real.
What you do in between is a game.
Right in front of you
lies the world.
At the very end
is truth.

We eat food. We wear clothes.
It's all part of this passing game.
The past clings to our bodies.
Cross the doorway:
there is truth.

Badness never ends,
and there's never enough good.
In the end, time is a game.
High on the mountain, God is king.
Higher than heaven
is truth.

2. Ibid., 30 [*nānāṭi batuku*].

III [3]

Why cross the boundary
when there is no village?
It's like living without a name,
like words without love.

What use is ecstasy
without the agony of distance?
What good is shade without the sun?
What is patience without fury?
Why make anything—love or poetry—if two can't be one?

Why cross the boundary?

What good is goodness if you can't see it?
Why be tender if you have no friend?
What use is love if you can't let go?
Beauty is empty without passion.

Why cross the boundary?

Why have a lover you don't need to hide?
You can't come close without a little doubt.
What joy is there in love fulfilled,
no extras, no questions?
Bring in our Lord of the Hill.

Why cross the boundary?

IV [4]

Where is my wisdom?
Time is lost, an offering
poured in the dust.

I think I need this thing, or maybe that thing.
I never get beyond such hopes.
I keep on waiting, and time lures me
like a deer behind a bush,

an offering poured in the dust.

3. Ibid., 92 [*urū leni polimera*].
4. Ibid., 99 [*eḍa sujñānamu*].

There's always this plan, or maybe that one,
and my problems will be over.
I go through trick after trick,
trapped in thoughts and hurt.
Time melts like butter next to fire,

an offering poured in the dust.

I'm sure I'll be happy here, or maybe over there,
so I keep moving from place to place.
I don't even see the god right next to me.
Time goes, like empty talk,

an offering poured in the dust.

V[5]

When I'm done being angry,
then I'll make love.
Right now, you should be glad
I'm listening.

When you flash that big smile,
I smile back. It doesn't mean I'm not angry.
You keep looking at me,
so I look, too. It isn't right
to ignore the boss.

Right now you should be glad.

You say something, and I answer.
That doesn't make it a conversation.
You call me to bed, I don't make a fuss.
But unless I want it myself,
it doesn't count as love.

Right now you should be glad.

You hug me, I hug you back:
you can see I'm still burning.
I can't help it, Lord of the Hill,
if I'm engulfed in your passion.

Right now you should be glad.

5. Annamayya, *Śṛṅgāra-saṅkīrtanalu,* vol. 32, ed. P. T. Jangannatha Ravu (Tirupati: Tirumala Tirupati Devasthnam, 1964), [copperplate 1617, 109], 78.

VI [6]

You have to solve the riddle you've posed.
Can I unravel it alone?

A bubble is born in a second from the water
and, for a while,
looks like a million.
Is it real or contingent?
Tell me what it means.

You have to solve the riddle.

A breeze blows through the sky,
sweeps through the world.
Then it merges into nowhere.
Is it illusion, or is it truth?
Tell me what it means.

You have to solve the riddle.

Plants shoot up from the soil
and become grain for the farmer.
Then they die back into the earth.
Do they exist, or do they not?
Tell me what it means.

You have to solve the riddle.

VII [7]

When you're done with one,
another will be waiting.
Life is a play of shadows on the screen.

If you're not poor, you're stuck with riches.
You'll never have time to think of God.
There's always a zillion things to do.
Life whips you, like a bonded slave,

this play of shadows on the screen.

6. Annamayya, *Adhyātma-saṅkīrtanalu,* vol. 2, ed. Gauripeddi Ramasubbasarma (Tirupati: Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam, 1981) [copperplate 173, 360], 242.

7. Annamayya, *Adhyātma-saṅkīrtanalu,* vol. 8, ed, Rallapalli Anantakrishnasarma and Udayagiri Srinivasacaryulu (Tirupati: Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam, 1952), [copperplate 220, 111], 75.

If you say no to the bad, you are bound by the good.
You'll never have time to think of God.
Life seeps in, like water under the carpet.
If you won't work for wages, it'll take work for nothing,

this play of shadows on the screen.

You're tired all day, and at night sleep takes over.
You'll never have time to think of God.
When the Lord of the Hill stands before you,
you won't believe it. Life is nothing but show,

this play of shadows on the screen.

VIII [8]

All connections
are with god.
If you know this,
you won't get stuck.

The moment you look, you get attached.
If you start talking, you make it worse.
If you smile, you're deeper in it.
Turn away, you won't be caught.

All connections are with god.

If you open your ears, the whole world grabs you.
Live in the world, and you're trapped.
The more you live, the more you are bound.
Turn away, say nothing, you won't be caught.

All connections are with god.

You want to help, you want to give:
you only tighten your chains.
If you want to be master,
you are totally lost.
Set your mind on god
alone, and
nothing binds you.

All connections are with god.

8. *Adhyātma-saṅkīrtanalu*, vol. 2 [copperplate 145, 204], 137.

IX[9]

Imagine that I wasn't here. What would you do with your kindness?
You get a good name because of me.

I'm number one among idiots. A huge mountain of ego.
Rich in weakness, in giving in to my senses.
You're lucky you found me. Try not to lose me.

Imagine that I wasn't here.

I'm the Emperor of Confusion, of life and death.
Listed in the book of bad *karma*.
I wallow in births, womb after womb.
Even if you try, could you find one like me?

Imagine that I wasn't here.

Think it over. By saving someone so low,
you win praise all over the world.
You get merit from me, and I get life
out of you. We're right for each other,
Lord of the Hill.

Imagine that I wasn't here.

X[10]

I may never know you,
but you are my lord.
Come home. No more games.

I really can't stop wanting you,
so I get angry and turn to sarcasm.
Over and over, I dream of making love.
It doesn't happen. I get upset.

Come home.

Irritated that I can't see you,
I find fault with everything.
I want you to want me on your own.

9. *Adhyātma-saṅkīrtanalu,* vol. 3 (Tirupati: Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam, 1998), [copperplate 208, 48], 32–33.

10. *Śṛṅgāra-saṅkīrtanalu,* vol. 18, ed. P. T. Jangannatha Ravu (Tirupati: Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam, 1964) [copperplate 430, 179), 103.

I charge at shadows.
I'm so tired.

Come home.

No one can hold your love.
Embracing you, I am proud.
You've taken me to the limit
of loving, Lord of the Hills.
I'll take you in.

Come home.

ELEVEN

Allasāni Pĕddana

Early sixteenth century

In the courtly tradition of classical Telugu, Allasāni Pĕddana stands out as possibly the supreme achievement. Only one great work of his has survived: the *Manu-caritramu,* which tells the story of the birth of the First Man, Svārociṣa Manu, on the basis of the earlier narration in *Mārkaṇḍeya-purāṇa* (probably known to Pĕddana through Mārana's late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century Telugu version). Pĕddana's choice of this text is surely meaningful, for it offers a vision of human generativity and human fate very much in line with the dominant concerns of the early sixteenth century at the Vijayanagara capital.

Pĕddana is closely tied to Kṛṣṇadevarāya, whose genealogy he gives in the preamble to his book. (Kṛṣṇadevarāya quotes from Pĕddana's genealogical verses in the introduction to *his* work, the *Āmukta-mālyada;* this citation may have contributed to the erroneous notion that Pĕddana was the author of the latter work as well.) The *cāṭu* tradition asserts that the king himself tied the *gaṇḍa-pĕṇḍeramu,* the "hero's anklet," onto the poet's left foot; the anklet bore the images of all rival poets, so that anyone who wore it would be seen as kicking these rivals on their heads. This act of royal recognition is said to have followed Pĕddana's improvisation of the long *utpala-mālika,* translated below, which sets out the new contours of poetic composition in Sanskrit and Telugu. The existence of this verse, in the oral tradition, signals the emergence of a new aesthetic in Telugu *kāyva.*

The *Manu-caritramu* itself bears witness to Pĕddana's place among the literati: the king, in commissioning this work, refers to its author as *āndhra-kavitā-pitāmaha,* the "creator of Telugu poetry" (1.15). There is clearly a sense in which this is true: Pĕddana transformed *kāyva* into a medium of amazing density, precision, and exquisite lyricism. His descriptive passages

are sometimes strikingly realistic, such as in the fourth canto, when he describes a royal hunt. His heightened prose (*gadya*) is complex and rhythmically structured, with long compounds and elevated syntax—really a form of poetry. This linguistic invention makes a constructed artfulness the mainstay of *kāyva,* as opposed to the modern, romantic notion of a "natural" poetic. The skill of the poet lies in the *making* of the poem, in a style that is uniquely his own invention, remote from everyday speech. Within this artful construction, the poet has total command and control; every syllable is in its proper place, and is irreplaceable. This gives Pĕddana's style an appearance of economy and grace.

A rich texture of literary legends envelops the images of the two great figures of Pĕddana and his patron, Kṛṣṇadevarāya. They serve as the prototype for the core-relationship of poet and patron in all subsequent generations, even up to the present day. A *cāṭu* verse couched as a lament by Pĕddana at the death of his king tells us of the honor and affection that the latter had for his poet:

ĕdur′aina co tana mada-karīndramu nilpi kelūtay ŏsagiy ĕkkiñcu kŏniyĕ
kokaṭa-grāmādy-anekāgrahārambul′ aḍigina sīmalayandun iccĕ
manucaritramb′ andu-kŏnu veḷa puram′ ega pallaki tana kela paṭṭi ĕttĕ
birudaina kavi-gaṇḍa-pĕṇḍeramunak′ īvĕ tagud′ ani tāne pādamuna tŏḍigĕ
āndhra-kavitā-pitāmaha allasāni pĕddana kavīndra ani nannu pilucunaṭṭi
kṛṣṇa-rāyala-to divik′ egaleka bratikiy unnāḍa jīvacchavamban agucu

When he would see me on the street, he would halt his elephant
and help me up with his own hand.
For the mere asking, he gave me villages like Kokaṭa, in any region.
On the day I dedicated my *Story of Manu* to him,
he himself carried the palanquin where I was seated.
He told me I alone was worthy to wear the anklet
of a triumphant poet, and it was he who tied it on my foot.
He called me Master of Telugu Poetry, Allasāni Pĕddana, King of Poets.

Now Kṛṣṇarāya has died, and I couldn't go with him
to heaven. I stay on,
like the living dead.

The royal gift of Kokaṭa village to the poet is borne out by inscriptional evidence from 1519 where, once again, the title *āndhra-kavitā-pitāmaha* appears. Other epigraphs suggest that Pĕddana was given a *nayaṅkāra*—rights over land in return for military services and collection of taxes—and that he played an active role in the affairs of state.

THE BRAHMIN MEETS THE COURTESAN[1]

[The passage translated below describes what is perhaps the most famous erotic counter in Telugu literature, contextualized by the anthropogonic theme at the heart of Pĕddana's great text. Manu, the first man, is born after a convoluted prehistory beginning with Pravara, an innocent Brahmin who suffers from wanderlust. Given a magic ointment for his feet that allows him to fly to the Himâlayas, Pravara soon finds himself stranded there: the ointment has washed off in the snows, and he has no idea how to return home, to his wife and family. In this unhappy predicament, Pravara encounters the divine dancing girl Varūthini, who promptly falls in love with him and seeks to seduce him. The attempt ends in frustration: Pravara, clearly cognizant of Varūthini's charms, rejects her advances (and eventually makes his way home with the help of the god of fire, Agni); for her part, the hapless woman of love is driven to ever more explicit statements culminating in the dramatic ideology of passion in the final verse of our selection.

We will follow Pravara through the initial stages of this meeting, from the moment the apparition of perfect female beauty invades his consciousness to the point where, unsettled, close to panic, he makes his decision; we then turn briefly to Varūthini's despairing response. Pravara is first made aware that he is not alone in the remote mountain landscape by a characteristic fragrance, which he innocently mistakes:]

One part musk enhanced by two parts camphor:
densely packed betel[2] sent its fragrance,
masking all others, to announce
the presence of a woman.

He followed the fragrance
carried by the breeze, wave after wave,
thinking, "There are people here."
Then he saw her,

a body gleaming like lightning,
eyes unfolding like a flower,
long hair black as bees,
a face lit up with beauty,
proudly curved breasts,
a deep navel—

a woman, but from another world.

1. Pĕddana, *Manu-caritramu* (Hyderabad: Andhra Pradesh Sahitya Akademi, 1966), 2.24–35, 38–54, 62.

2. Women chewed betel nut compounded with musk and camphor in these proportions.

She was sitting on a raised platform
at the foot of a young mango tree
in the courtyard of her house, which was built
of precious gems.
And, as a cool wind blew against her face,

the red skirt inside the white half-sari
that veiled her thighs
turned the gleaming moonstone beneath her
red, and the gourds of the vina
rubbed against her firm breasts
as her delicate fingers seemed to caress
sweet music from the strings,
and she was languid with longing,
her eyes half-closed as if,
flowing with the song, she was slowly
making love with expert skill,
beyond herself with pleasure,
while the bracelets on her hands
chimed the rhythm of the song
and there was joy, brilliant joy,
as she played on.

Amazed, she opened her eyes wide,
and, as light poured in,
the pupils seemed to blossom
like opening flowers,
and her round breasts came alive
as she thrilled to the sight
of that Brahmin, a god on earth,
handsome as a young god,[3]
while thought went wild
in her mind.

She saw him. Stood up
and walked toward him, the music
of her anklets marking the rhythm,
her breasts, her hair, her delicate waist
trembling. Stood by a smooth areca tree
as waves of light from her eyes
flooded the path that he was walking.

3. Specifically, Nalakūbara, Kubera's son, one of the exemplars of male beauty.

First there was doubt,
a certain hesitation,
then a widening joy
as desires raced within her:
her mind was crying "Yes!"
her eyelids blinking,
for she was close to him now
and nearly paralyzed,
as her eyes, wide as the open lotus,
enfolded him in burning moonbeams.

She stared at him.
Like tiny bursts of smoke
that proved she was burning
with love,
the hairs on her body
stood on end.

Musk trickled in thin lines of sweat
from her forehead to her cheeks,
as if the God of Desire were marking a limit
for her still-widening eyes,
lest they shake off their lids entirely
and take over
her face.

Fluttering glances healed
her inability to blink,
and for the first time
she was sweating;
even her surpassing understanding
was healed by the new
confusion of desire.[4]
Like the beetle that, from concentrating
on the bee, *becomes* a bee,[5]
by taking in that human being
she achieved humanity
with her own body.

4. As a goddess, Varūthini does not blink; nor is she capable of sweating. Note that she is here transformed, in a movement seen as positive, from this divine state to a human mode of being.

5. This is a proverbial statement of transformation through mental obsession (the *bhramara-kīṭa-nyāya*).

Drunk on his beauty and movements, she was thinking:

"Where did he come from, this man
more lovely than Spring or the Moon?[6]
There's no one to compare to him.
Can a Brahmin be so handsome? If only
he would take me, Love himself
would be my slave."

Her heart was caught in a storm
of compelling passion.
In haste, shaking off shyness,
her anklets ringing,
she stood directly in his path.
He saw her, very close, and said,
in some confusion:

"Who are you, young woman
with darting eyes,
moving alone in this wild land?
Aren't you afraid?
I'm a Brahmin. My name is Pravara.
I've lost my way. Like a fool
I chose to come to this mountain.
I want to go home. What's the way
out? Show me, and god will bless you."

As he told her his story, her eyes
grew bright. Her earrings, breasts, and waist
were quivering now, as she parted her lips
and smiled:

"You have such beautiful eyes—can't you see
your way? You just want to strike up
a conversation with a woman you found
alone. Surely you know
the way you came. You ask so boldly.
Maybe you just want to play."

So she said, playfully hiding her meaning, and went on:

"The goddess born from the ocean of milk[7]
in the wake of the crescent moon

6. Spring is another examplar of male beauty. The poet adds a comparison to Jayanta, Indra's son, and to Nalakūbara.

7. Lakṣmi, goddess of beauty and wealth.

is our sister. Our gift is in making
music to fan desire, with voice and lute,
pure enough to melt a stone.
The arts and sciences of making love
are our birthright: smooth
as butter. Men go through huge sacrifices—
offering up horses,[8] crowning kings[9]—
just to win our hand. We perform
on stages set with emeralds,
in the shade of wishing trees
on the Golden Mountain,
and the courts of the gods
are where we get our exercise.

My name, young man, is Varūthini.
You must have heard of Ghṛtāci, Tilottama, Hariṇi,
Hema, Rambha, and Śasirekha.[10]
They're my friends.

We spend our days in love,
wandering through caves lit by jewels
on this Snow Mountain.
Cool winds rinsed in the spray of the heavenly Ganges
play upon blossoms alive with bees
in my private gardens.

You say you're a Brahmin, but really
you're the King of Love. You have come to me
as a guest; allow me to welcome you
to my jeweled home, where you can rest.

The noon sun has burned your body, tender as gold;
the wind has wilted your handsome face.
Honor my house
by your presence, refresh yourself here,
and then go."

The Brahmin answered:

"Your offer is very enticing,
but I have to go.

8. The *aśvamedha,* the most complex and expensive of Vedic rituals.

9. The *rājasūya,* for anointing or renewing a king.

10. These are all famous names, divinely beautiful women familiar from the classical epic/*purāṇic* mythology.

Home. To my village. Now.
Consider I have come.
What counts is your affection.
I have rituals to perform.
I have to go. Fast.
Forgive me, please.

There must be some way
I can reach my home. You have
the power. You're a woman of the gods.
There is nothing you cannot do.
You're like my mother.
Bring me to my people."

A little smile played on her lips.

"Where is that village of yours? You say
you won't even rest your feet, you only want
to go home. What a shame!
Are your village huts better than
what is here, the jewel-lit caves,
sandalwood gardens, sandbanks on the river,
these beds of Moonlight Vines?

Let me confess.
My mind is stuck
on you. Do you want to leave me
to the torments of love, or hold me
on beds of flowers where the bees sing,
drunk on honey?"

So she had said it—and Pravara replied,
"Young woman, how can you say that
to me, a Brahmin committed
to the rites day after day? This love
is not proper. Don't you know that?

I haven't fed the fires, or the gods, or the Brahmins.
It's long past supper time.
My mother and father are very old; they must be waiting
for me, no doubt uneasy, and faint with hunger.
As for me, I am responsible
for all the sacred fires: if I don't reach home
today, young woman,
all my world will be ravaged."

Now her face showed disappointment, as she said:
"Handsome man,
if you let your youth go by
in these dreadful rites,
when will you enjoy your life?
Isn't the point of all these rituals
to go to heaven
to make love to us?

When the heart unfolds
in love, when it finds release from within
in undivided oneness, like a steady flame
glowing in a pot, when the senses attain
unwavering delight—

only that joy
is ultimately real.
Think about the ancient words:
ānando brahma, God
is joyfulness.

SANSKRIT AND TELUGU[11]

Is poetry a surface sheen,
the green delusion of unfolded buds?
It must be real inside
and out, exploding fragrance,
an aching touch your body can't forget
by day or night, like of your woman,
whenever you think about it.
It should come over you, it should murmur
deep in the throat, as your lover in her dovelike moaning,
and as you listen, yearning comes in all its beauty.
If you take hold of it, your fingers tingle
as if you were tracing the still-hidden breasts
of a young girl, wholly embraced.
If you sink your teeth into it, it should be succulent
as the full lips of a ripe woman from another world,
sitting on your knees. It should ring
as when godly Sound strokes with her fingernails

11. For text of this *utpala-mālika,* see Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman, *A Poem at the Right Moment: Remembered Verses from Premodern South India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 35–36.

the strings of her vina, with its golden bulbs resting
on her proud, white, pointed breasts,
so that the *rāga*-notes resound.
That is the pure Telugu mode.
If you use Sanskrit, then a rushing, gushing
overflow of moonlight waves, luminous and cool,
from Śiva's crest, the mountain-born goddess beside him,
enveloping actors and their works, the dramas
spoken by Speech herself in the presence of the Golden Seed,
pounding out the powerful rhythms, the beat
of being, through drums and strings
and chiming bells and thousands of ringing anklets
dancing, drawing out the words, the fragrant and subtle
winds wafting essence of unfolding lotus
from the Ganges streaming in the sky should
comfort your mind. You should shiver
in pleasure again and again, each time
you hear it, as rivulets of honeyed juices and butter
and sweet milk flow together
and mix their goodness more and more
and more.

TWELVE

Kṛṣṇadevarāya

r. 1509–1529

The emblematic king of the Vijayanagara state at its peak, Kṛṣṇadevarāya was also a Telugu poet of the first order. His father, Narasā Nāyaka, founded the third, or Tuluva, dynasty at Vijayanagara; his mother was a Tuḷu woman, Nāgâmba, so there is reason to believe that Kṛṣṇadevarāya's first language was Tuḷu. Kṛṣṇadevarāya's ascension to the throne marks a moment of dramatic expansion in the state-system over which he ruled—a period of military conquests, social change (including the mobilization of a new elite bound in ties of personal loyalty to the king), vast public building, and literary and artistic innovation. In the eyes of the south Indian tradition, Kṛṣṇadevarāya has always remained the synoptic "great king," a symbol of elegant power, wealth, and love for his god: Veṅkaṭeśvara at the Tirupati temple, which the king visited many times as a pilgrim.

He is the only Telugu poet whose physical portrait we can realistically reconstruct. Domingos Paes, a Portuguese visitor to the court, describes him as pock-marked, irascible, "of fair complexion and good figure, rather fat than thin."[1] This image is at odds with the idealized images of Kṛṣṇadevarāya that we see, for example, in bronze sculpture at Tirupati (together with his two wives), or on the north gateway at Cidambaram. Along with these visual images, we have a rich depiction of this king in the oral *cāṭu* tradition, which connects him to various women, to the court jester Tĕnāli Rāmaliṅgaḍu, and to a series of eight great poets, the *aṣṭa-diġ-gajas.* This retrospective *cāṭu* vision of the royal court, which seems to have crystallized in the mid–seventeenth century, gives a sense of constant poetic produc-

1. Cited by Robert Sewell, *A Forgotten Empire (Vijayanagar): A Contribution to the History of India* (London: S. Sonnenschein and Co., Ltd., 1900), 246–47.

tion and competition among poets, masterminded by the discriminating presence of the great poet-king.

His great work—the only one of many to have survived—is the *Āmuktamālyada,* which tells the story of the Vaiṣṇava poetess Godā/Aṇṭāḷ, from Villiputtūr. Veṅkaṭeśvara himself is said to have commissioned the poem by appearing to the king in a dream at Śrīkākulam, in Kṛṣṇa District (see the first selection below). This remarkable book is couched in a unique style, which jogs the listener's sensibility and prevents him or her from taking anything for granted. Language is radically deroutinized, both lexically and syntactically. Nearly every verse demands long attention if one is to absorb the new world that it reveals. Unprecedented combinations of words and images are powerfully compacted, and require unraveling. An enormous erudition in many branches of traditional science and learning is brought to bear upon scenes of ordinary life, of peasants and housewives, meticulously observed with all the care of a modern anthropologist. Both an extraordinary realism and a sweeping imagination come into play as the poet moves from the kitchen to the battlefield, from the courtesan quarters to the temple or the royal palace. This highly crafted style was beyond imitation; no later Telugu poets attempted anything like it.

Within this linguistic and poetic domain, we can also observe the attempt to lay down an entirely new basis for kingship and the political order. Like Kṛṣṇadevarāya himself (as the medieval tradition insists), the royal heroes of his poem are, in a sense, renouncer-kings, only reluctantly drafted into ruling, but, once incorporated in the political sphere, effective, empowered, and wise. This new understanding of politics, which encompasses the inherent conflicts and tensions of kingship within the total, unitary self of the king, is part of the more general innovative elaboration of the early sixteenth-century psychosocial world at the imperial capital, as we see, for example, in the works of Kṛṣṇadevarāya's contemporary poets, Pĕddana and Timmana.

In addition to the preamble of the *Āmukta-mālyada,* which describes the circumstances of the work's composition, we have translated some verses of naturalistic and socially realistic description as well as the opening to the story of Viṣṇu-citta (Pĕriyāḻvār), which provides the central frame for the entire book. Viṣṇu-citta's daughter, Godā, will eventually go on to marry the god, Viṣṇu as Raṅganātha, at the great temple of Śrīraṅgam. In the Tamil story of Godā/Aṇṭāḷ, this young girl is said to have been in the habit of garlanding herself with the flowers woven for the god; when her father discovered this by noticing a hair in the garland, he rejected the polluted garland and made another for the offering. Viṣṇu came to him in a dream, however, and informed him that he wanted only the garland worn by Godā. This part of the story is missing from the Telugu text, although it is still named *Āmukta-mālyada,* "the woman who gives a garland already worn."

THE KING'S DREAM[2]

He can be seen on the goddess,
in the sheen of her pendant.
And she is there on the jewel he wears,

as if their images of one another
that had been held inside them
had come out clearly, and were mirrored.

This is the lord of Veṅkaṭam,
the god I love.[3]

Some time ago, I was determined to conquer the Kaliṅga territory. On the way, I camped for a few days with my army in Vijayavāḍa. Then I went to visit Āndhra Viṣṇu, who lives in Śrīkākuḷa.[4] Observing the fast of Viṣṇu's day,[5] in the fourth and final watch of that god's night,

Āndhra Viṣṇu came to me in my dream.
His body was a radiant black, blacker than a rain cloud.
His eyes, wide and sparkling, put the lotus to shame.
He was clothed in the best golden silk, finer still
than the down on his eagle's wings.[6]
The red of sunrise is pale compared to the ruby on his breast.
The goddess who was with him held a lotus in one hand,
and his hand in the other, and her gentle glance was enough
to do away with every loss. He was smiling, spilling goodness
as he spoke to me:

"You told the Story of Madâlasa, exciting connoisseurs of poetry
with skillful similes and metaphors and the trope of true description.
You sang of Satyabhāma, a poem resonant with feeling.
You made a collection of superb stories culled from all ancient books.
You composed the Gem of Wisdom, an eloquent work
that dispels residues of darkness in those who hear it.

2. Kṛṣṇadevarāya, *Āmukta-mālyada,* ed. Vedamu Venkatarayasastri, 2nd ed. (Madras: Vedamu Venkatarayasastri and Brothers, 1964), 1.1, 11–18, 44.

3. This invocation is followed by nine more introductory verses, which we have not translated here.

4. Today in Kṛṣṇa District, not far from Vijayavāḍa (near Kuchipūḍi). The god of Śrīkākuḷam is known as Āndhra Viṣṇu and may have marked an ancient focus of Andhra cultural identity.

5. *Ekādaśi,* the eleventh day of the lunar cycle, sacred to Vaiṣṇavas.

6. Viṣṇu rides the great bird Garuḍa.

You astounded us with honeyed poems in the language of the gods,
The Pleasures of Poetry and other essays.[7]
Is Telugu beyond you? Make a book in Telugu
now, for my delight.

You might be wondering which 'me' to describe. I'll tell you.
You remember that wedding in Śrīraṅgam, when I married
the girl who had given me a garland she wore first?
Tell that story. I'm a Telugu king,
and you're the king of Kannaḍa.
Once I accepted, with no great liking,
a garland given by a man.[8] You can make good
that loss by singing of the special joy
that comes from touching what a lover touched.

'Why Telugu?' you might ask.
This is the Telugu land.
I am the lord of Telugu.
There is nothing sweeter.
Because you speak Telugu,
many kings come to serve you.
Among all the languages of the land,
Telugu is best.

Who should receive it?
Give it to the god you chose as yours,
the Lord of Veṅkaṭam, for I am he.
We differ only in name.

If you complete this book, you'll go
from strength to strength." Then the god
went away, and I woke up. I was moved
and amazed. I bent my head
toward the towers of his temple
and, at the hour of dawn, said
my morning prayers.

I held court in the presence of my army men and subordinate kings, but dismissed them early to their homes. Then I called the scholars learned in many old texts, of various traditions, honored them, and related my

7. The verse offers the following names—probably only descriptive titles, despite our italics—for Kṛṣṇadevarāya's earlier works: *Madâlasa-caritra, Satyavadhū-prīṇanambu, Sakala-kathā-sāra-saṅgrahambu, Jñāna-cintāmaṇi,* and *Rasa-mañjari.*

8. Kṛṣṇa was garlanded by Sudāma.

good dream. They were thrilled and astonished, and they said: "Lord, this dream where the lord of lords appeared promises a long series of happy events. Let us explain. First, the fact that the god became visible in your dream means that your love for him will grow. That he asked you to compose a book means you will achieve a far deeper understanding of literary art. That he came with his wife, goddess of wealth, shows that your treasury will be immensely enriched. She held a white lotus in her hand: you will therefore wield the one and only white parasol of royalty. He mentioned that you must know the respective languages spoken by the many kings who serve you; this says that still more kings will be pulled to you. That statement about the joy that comes from touching what a lover touched promises that you will be loved by many more women. He said you will go from strength to strength if you compose this book; certainly you will live a long life and be blessed with many sons. You were born in the line of King Turvasu, who sustained the world with no small strength, so there is nothing surprising in this series of happy events that will come to you. . . . So, powerful king, king of kings, brilliant with energy, defender of fortresses, sole sovereign in the fields of letters and war, Kṛṣṇarāya: do compose that book."

VIṢṆU-CITTA OF VILLIPUTTŪR[9]

There were coconut trees, and their clusters of fruit
were a brighter red than the breasts of the Pāṇḍya women,
daubed with vermilion, and there was a road
paved with diamonds, for the Ocean that had been plundered
of its gems when they built that city wanted to retain
a few last stones, so he offered hostages
for this privilege: a row of wishing trees, his sons
from heaven, and the white Ganges, his first wife.[10]

Draviḍa women walk through the inner paths of the gardens with
lotus flowers they picked for worship, the stems
held in their hands while the blossoms quiver in water
they have drawn from lily ponds to pots they carry on their waists
to bathe the god, and their bodies, bathed in turmeric,

9. Kṛṣṇadevrāya Āmukta-mālyada, 1.54, 56, 59–60, 64–65, 74, 77–82, 84; 2.71–72, 74–94.

10. The Ganges is considered to be the wife of the ocean, and the celestial wishing trees are his sons.

bend beneath the merciless weight of their breasts,
their anklets ringing as they sing the Tamil texts of prayer.[11]

When they cast the dice with a flourish of bracelets,
even a hermit's heart would miss a beat.
So lost are they in play that Desire himself would be unmanned
if he intruded: they would hardly lift their heads to see him.
But if they catch sight of someone immersed in serving God,
they rise and bow to him with such beauty
that the king of gods is jealous.
When they turn their eyes, straining to hear the conch blown in the temple,
that sideways glance could cut right through you.
Sitting on the front porches of their houses, they throw the dice-shells
with so much energy that their hair comes loose, the other hand moves up
to fix it, and from beneath the sari and silk blouse
a full firm breast emerges clearly like the Love God's pillow:
that is how courtesans play at dice.

With one grain of unhusked rice they scrape away red betel stains
from their teeth, until they gleam like moonlight.
They make their bodies bright with turmeric, but with a touch so light
it never yellows the towel. They finger their breasts
all over with fragrant sandal, thin and liquid,
slipping their hands inside their saris.
When a necklace tears in the rush of loving, and pearls
scatter everywhere, they pay no heed.
They can know a man on sight—his caste and culture.
And if a lover becomes poor, or loses power, they go on caring.
They live in style: the king sees them as his queens outside.
Gifted with language, they make poems.
Rich is the life of women who delight.

At the jeweled steps leading down to the pools hidden behind houses
where Tamil women have rubbed sticks of turmeric for their bath,
yellow seeps into the water and stains the edges
of the wings of sleeping geese, so when they waddle through the village
you might think they were a parade of geese with golden plumage
just arrived from the gods' river in the sky.

11. The poet refers by name to the *Divya-prabandham,* the Tamil Śrīvaiṣṇava corpus of devotional hymns.

Heads tucked between their wings, ducks sleep in ponds
nestled in the fields. But the village watchmen think
they must be towels squeezed dry and left behind
by Brahmins after their morning bath.
Seeking to retrieve them, the watchmen
walk into the water, the ducks take off,
the girls who guard the paddy fields laugh.

And then, during the night, the cool breeze off southern hills
rings the golden bells on the flagpole in the temple,
and birds perched in the branches of champak trees in the
courtyard are
startled and flutter their wings, and couples who have quarreled
think dawn has come so they hasten to make up
and make love.

There lived there a man named Viṣṇu-citta,
whose name means "God in mind,"
and it was literally true: for he had bound the god
with Yoga the way a chain holds back a elephant.
His lips were always chanting the Viṣṇu mantra,
and he had gone beyond all opposites.
Though he had never studied Veda
or any metaphysics, the subtle but stable difference
between God and living beings
was firmly rooted in his mind.

Through the compassion of his teacher, whom he found as the result of the good actions he had done in many previous lives, he was led to certain knowledge, as a hidden gift in one life always leads one to a treasure in the next: he knew that he was separate from the elements, and that God was separate from him, and that the relation between his Self and the Supreme Self, between part and whole, had no beginning. He believed: "If a Yogi has achieved the unfragmented joy that comes with this knowledge, what use to him are all the troublesome forms of learning? Without insight, Logic is empty magic, Analysis is paralysis, the Kapila system is a poor copy, Exegesis is facetious, Grammar is a stammer. Moreover, if a person does begin to study, time is never enough, and obstacles always intervene; resources are scant, but as soon as he acquires partial knowledge, his pride takes over. On the other hand, if he studies to the end and achieves real wisdom, he will want to reject anything qualified or conditioned, just as someone who has been given paddy rejects the dry stalks, or someone enriched with honey rejects the empty comb. So what use is there in mastering these texts only to give them up afterward, if one

has already made peace inside and out, as I have, self-fulfilled as I am? Of course it might be useful to people who enjoy winning an argument or flattering a king, who are not yet tired of being born and reborn. But for anyone like me, that kind of fame is famine, such gain is pain, and honors are simply horrors." Viṣṇu-citta knew that the ultimate goals for God's servants were to win unimaginable wisdom on earth—like that Brahmin Bharata[12] who long ago instructed the Sauvīra king and led him to release—and, in the other world, to assume extraordinary and enduring forms to worship God. With this awareness he happily took on the work of making garlands for Viṣṇu in that town.

With whatever he earned from his work,
this great Yogi used to feed all the worshipers of God
who came and went on the road
between the Snow Mountain in the north
and the Sandal Hills of the South.

On days soaked through with showers,
when the very sky turned to water,
his wife would add shavings of dry coconut shells
to the smoldering logs, to keep the smoke
from her eyes, and quickly she would serve the meal
with a coconut-wood ladle—rice, peeled lentils,
a few stir-fried curries,[13] dried vegetables saved
for the rainy season,[14] together with curds
and plenty of ghee.

The summer menu included lukewarm white rice,
sweet soup, cool jelly,[15] sorghum gruel, sugarcane juice,
coconut milk, various juices, fruit, fragrant cold water,
pickled baby mangoes,[16] suspended in brine,
and buttermilk—preceded by sandalpaste
for your body.

12. A simpleton, *jaḍa-bharata,* who was asked to join the palanquin-bearers for King Rahūgaṇa, but stumbled under the burden; when the king became angry, this simple man enlightened him with words of ultimate wisdom.

13. *Pŏgapina kūralu* are vegetables rapidly fried in spices—a dish that requires only minutes of cooking on the fire.

14. *Vaḍiyamulu* and *varugu* are vegetables pre-dried in the hot season and stored for the rains, when they can be rapidly fried and served.

15. *Timmaṇamu.*

16. *Vaḍa pindĕ.*

Fresh rice fragrant with civet, several curries with black pepper
still simmering in the pan, chutneys so sharp with mustard
they clear the nose, milk pudding, mango pickles,
fresh ghee that almost burns your fingers, and thickened milk
in abundance—he served in winter.

This is what you would hear in the middle of the night
if you passed by the house of that disciplined man:
stories about the god who sleeps on a snake,[17]
chanting of the Tamil texts of prayer,
and humble words in Sanskrit—"There's no great variety
in the vegetables we can serve," "They're probably
not hot enough," "What we have is not much,
even the rice is less than fine, but please do us the favor
of eating."

. . . . . .

Once when the boat festival for the god of Vṛṣagiri[18]
near Madhura[19] fell in the hot season,
a Brahmin came from another land
on pilgrimage. He wanted to see the splendors
of Madhura City, so he went there, bathed
in the Vaigha River at twilight, and was resting
that night in the house of the king's Brahmin priest.

With their travel bags as pillows,
a group of Brahmins was lying on a porch by the roadside:
to pass the time, under the full moon,
one would sing an *ārya* verse, another would answer
with a *gīta,* and the foreign Brahmin would cite
wise sayings.[20]

[That night,]
perfumed with musk and rosewater that proclaimed his royal presence,
as the breeze blowing over waves of light-red *pāṭala* flowers
shook the tassels on his turban and disturbed the bees
drawn to the garlands he wore, while the light glancing off
his pearl earrings, dancing as he walked, outshone the brilliance

17. Viṣṇu, who rests on the great serpent Ananta, on the cosmic ocean.
18. Aḻakarmalai, a major pilgrimage site to Viṣṇu / Tirumāl in the Maturai region.
19. Maturai, to the north of Villiputtūr.
20. *Ārya* is a set of meters. "Wise sayings" are *subhāṣitas,* gnomic or witty verses.

of the strings of thick pearls around his neck,
the king walked through the streets, a moving mountain of gold,
holding in his hand the pleats of his flowing garment,
bordered in red like the rising moon, and a honed sword as well,
with golden hilt, while a serving girl carried betel leaves
and his armed guard preceded him in wide formation,
on his way to enjoy his favorite concubine in an inner palace
in another part of town.

He heard that Brahmin as he was reciting
a verse that stuck in his mind,
a warning for the future:
"One must prepare oneself well
in the eight dry months
for the rains that come;
during the daytime, for the dark night;
while you are young, for old age;
and right now,
for the life after dying."

The king heard the verse, thought deeply about its import,
understood it, and was stunned.
Then he became frightened at the danger
arising from within.
He went no farther; he stood still
in grief.

"What good are royal riches, luxuries,
the flurries of arousal? I put my trust
in this body, fragile as a bubble,
and gave no thought at all
to the path to freedom.
Even the most ancient kings, Manu and others,
though they lived to the end of the eon,
were finally crushed by Death.

You don't sense the movement,
like passengers inside a boat
that slowly brings them to the other shore:
Time, unnoticed, steals your days
and brings ruin.

Sagara, Nala, Purūravas,
Hariścandra, Purukutsa and Kārtavīrya,
Gaya, Pṛthu, Bhagīratha,

Suhotra, Śibi, and Bharata,
Dilīpa, Bhārgava, Māndhātṛ,
Śaśibindu, Anaṅga, and Ambarīṣa,
Yayāti, Ranti, Rāma, Maruttu:
did Time spare even one of them?

Fleeting as lightning
are the joys of kingship.
I won't give in to this addiction
any more. My whole energy
will be aimed at the joys
of another world.

If you just live a moral life,
you end up running back and forth
from heaven to earth, a tedious trail.
I don't want that. I want to find that god
who makes you free."

He had his guard give the Brahmin
a reward sealed in folded betel leaves, and went home.
When the night had passed,
he held court, gathered scholars of many views
and said, "Look into your books and decide
who best gives liberation."

He hung a bag full of freshly minted coins,
golden as *bira* flowers, in the court,
for whoever could reveal the truth
and defend it in cogent argument.
With eyes on that bag, hanging down
like a deadly snake, one proposed
Hara,[21] another Uma, someone else suggested Hari,[22]
others spoke for Fire, the Sun,
Gaṇapati,[23] the Moon, and Brahmā,
and they quarreled.

Meanwhile, in Villiputtūr, as Viṣṇu-citta
was putting on the *tulasi* garland
and chanting the god's mantra,
Mannanāru, the god himself,
spoke to him in sweet and elevated tones.

21. Śiva.
22. Viṣṇu.
23. Gaṇeśa, the elephant-headed god who removes obstacles.

"Mindful man, go today, quickly, to Madhura,
to defeat the scholars blinded by pride
who are boasting in the Pāṇḍya court.
Announce my power, and take the prize.
The king has broken with this world.
Be kind to him, make him love me."

Viṣṇu-citta shivered in fear, and fell
before the god, his body thrilling.
Tears of joy ran down his cheeks.
Head humbly bent, he begged:

"Swami, you want to send *me?*
I have never studied the texts, and my eyes
are unopened. My hands are callused and hardened
from constant digging with a rough shovel
in your garden. I am a mere servant in your house.
If you send me as your advocate and I am defeated
in the court, the discredit will be yours.

Ask me to sweep your floor,
bring water, carry your palanquin,
weave garlands, bear your insignia,
fan you and give you shade,
light your lamps as evening falls—
just don't send me to debate.
There must be others you could favor
with this role."

The god smiled, basking in his love.
He looked at the goddess and said,
"I'll make him win the debate,
you'll see." And he said to Viṣṇu-citta,

"Is it up to you?
Just go there. I'll make them accept you
in the court. Don't say anything more.
I'll be there with you."

The Āḻvār, afraid to speak,
prepared to go.

THIRTEEN

Nandi Timmana

Early sixteenth century

Later tradition imagines Nandi Timmana as one of the so-called *aṣṭa-diggajas,* the eight elephants of the cardinal directions, who supposedly graced the court of Kṛṣṇadevarāya at the apogee of the Vijayanagara period. Although this set of eight is probably a later (seventeenth-century) invention, Timmana's presence at Kṛṣṇadevarāya's court is historically verified. The poet dedicated his work, *Pārijātâpaharaṇamu,* to this king. The tradition asserts that the poet arrived in the court as a gift from the family of Tirumaladevi, Kṛṣṇadevarāya's senior wife.

The poet has another name: Mukku Timmana, "Timmana of the Nose." The title is associated with a verse supposedly composed by Timmana and then purchased by Bhaṭṭumūrti, in whose *Vasu-caritramu* it now appears. Here is the verse, based on the convention that bees avoid the *campaka* flower and on the standard comparison of the woman's nose to that flower (note the preponderance of nasal sounds in the Telugu original):

nānā-sūna-vitāna-vāsanalan ānandiñcu sāraṅgam′ e-
lā nann′ ŏllad′ aṭañcu gandhaphali bal kānan tapamb′ andi yo-
ṣā-nāsâkṛti dālci sarva-sumanas-saurabhya-samvāsiy ai
pūněn prekṣaṇa-mālikā-madhukarī-puñjambul īr-vankalan

In agony, the *campaka* blossom wondered
why bees enjoy the honey of so many flowers
but never come to her.
She fled to the forest to do penance.
As a reward, she achieved the shape of a woman's nose.
Now she takes in the perfumes
of all the flowers, and on both sides
she is honored by eyes
black as bees.

Timmana's famous poem, *Pārijātâpaharaṇamu,* describing Kṛṣṇa's attempt to appease his wife Satyabhāma by prostrating himself at her feet and by bringing her the gods' *pārijāta* tree, is said to have been composed under specific circumstances. One day Kṛṣṇadevarāya awoke to find Tirumaladevi asleep with her feet touching his face. The king was deeply upset at the queen's lack of respect. The poet—a protégé of this queen's, as we have said—composed his work in order to help her win back Kṛṣṇadevarāya's favor by educating the king in elementary matters of love.

SATYABHĀMA KICKS KṚṢṆA[1]

[Vaiśampāyana narrates to King Janamejaya:]

After Kṛṣṇa had defeated Narakâsura,
he married, at Nārada's suggestion,
sixteen thousand *apsaras* women, who were still youthful,
who had been imprisoned by that demon,
and who wanted god as their husband.

Even before this, he had eight wives—
Rukmiṇi, Satyabhāma, Jāmbavati, Mitravinda,
Bhadra, Sudanta, Kāḷindi, and Lakṣaṇa—
all equally proud.

He played with all of them in gardens on the outskirts of Dvarāvati,
on make-believe mountains, in arbors near the seashore, and in palaces
paved with moonstones on the banks of rivers made for pleasure.

He would take whatever form any one of them wanted him to have
at any time, and play with her as she desired. He was everywhere
you looked, swimming in a sea of joy, in a thousand forms
that flowed from his magic.

Though he paid equal attention to all these women,
there were two of them whom he loved more—
Rukmiṇi, daughter of King Bhoja,
and Satyabhāma, daughter of Satrājit.

Each one of them was sure that she had beauty, high birth,
and her husband's exclusive love. In their minds, they were rivals.

1. Nandi Timmana, *Pārijātâpaharaṇamu* (Madras: Vavilla Ramas Vamisastrulu and Sons, 1968), 1.37–55, 57–63, 65–78, 80–90, 92–99, 102–11, 114–16, 118–37.

One day Kṛṣṇa came to Rukmiṇi's rooms and,
seated on a slab of moonstone, with maidservants nearby,
he was playing dice with her alone, for fun

[when Nārada arrived from heaven on a surprise visit.]

Husband and wife met him and welcomed him with attention. Rukmiṇi signaled with her eyes, and her servants brought him a lion-seat. Kṛṣṇa, given permission, sat comfortably with folded hands and said:

"Great sage, you have graced me by your visit.
You always show me affection, for no particular reason."

The sage replied, "You're talking like an ordinary man,
and it isn't right. I know who you are—a blessing to all people.

You are the fish that entered the dark netherworld
and killed the thief of the ancient words.[2]
You are the tortoise who held the Mountain on his back
when the gods churned the ocean, and who gave them their food.
You are the boar who lifted the Earth on the edge of his tusk.
You are the lion that emerged from a pillar to save your servant at dusk.
You are the dwarf who stepped on the demon.[3]
You are the great hero[4] who suppressed all kings on earth.
You are the warrior[5] who threatened the ocean with an arrow.
And you are also you, living here in Dvāraka.

You seduce demon women.[6]
You stamp out evil.[7]
What more can I say in praise?

Dvāraka is heaven. Your Rukmiṇi
is the goddess Lakṣmi. I come here often
just because you are here, Mukunda,[8] killer of Kaṃsa."

With a full heart, the sage gave Kṛṣṇa a fresh *pārijāta* flower, folded in a golden lotus leaf; buzzing with bees, who seemed to be singing the

2. Viṣṇu's fish avatar, in which the god killed Somaka, the demon who had stolen the Vedas and hid them at the bottom of the ocean.
3. Bali.
4. Paraśurāma.
5. Ráma.
6. A reference to the Buddha avatar.
7. As Kalkin, the last avatar.
8. A name of Viṣṇu.

praises of its fragrance; dripping with honey, as if it were shedding tears of joy at being offered for use; dense with the brilliant promise of fulfilling all desires.

Kṛṣṇa took it with respect and amazement, and looked at Rukmiṇi, though in his mind he was thinking of Satyabhāma.

"If I give it to Rukmiṇi," he thought, "Satyabhāma will be angry.
If I send it to Satyabhāma as a gift, Rukmiṇi will feel humiliated.
But since I'm here, it's not right to send it elsewhere."

So, with a little smile, and supported by the sage
with a wink, he gave it to Rukmiṇi. She took it,
bowed to Nārada, and slipped it into her hair,
so she looked like Pārvatī crowned by the crescent moon,
entirely beautiful.

She was like a pearl newly washed.
Now Nārada, smiling mischievously,
eager to excite a quarrel, said:

"Lady, this is a *pārijāta* flower.
Human beings can't get it.
Śaci,[9] Pārvati, and Sarasvati wear it every day.
You need to know this, since he gave it you,
and since you are his life itself, outside his body.
No one can equal you among all his sixteen thousand wives.
And the flower is lucky to be worn by you.
When used correctly, it satisfies desire.
Let me tell you of its power.

It never wilts or loses fragrance.
It's always fresh, and full
of pollen. It's a queen of flowers.

When you are alone with your husband,
when you do that secret thing,
this flower inflames. It brings new vigor
to those games. It also dries the drops of sweat
on your bodies like a fan when you are done.
You can use it either way.

It even brings you tasty food: it won't let you be hungry or tired.
It brings good luck. There's nothing like it in all the worlds.

9. Indra's wife.

Put it on, and you'll be the most powerful and splendid
of all the women around here.

When you have it in your hair, your co-wives will bow at your feet,
and your husband won't dare to disobey a single word you say.
Your pleasures and pride will be unbroken.

When it's hot outside, it makes you cool,
and it gives heat in the cold season.
It does something new all the time.

For a long time I've been hearing that Kṛṣṇa is Satyabhāma's slave:
she has only to wink, and he'll jump. But I haven't noticed
that he loves anyone as much as you. If he did, wouldn't he have given
this priceless flower to someone else?

Satya[10] thinks she's the most beautiful, the most youthful,
the most famous. She thinks her husband wants
only her. She's too proud to care
for any other woman. Now, when she sees you
or hears about you from others, she'll be cut down to size.

If you put this flower in your hair, it will stay there
for one whole year. After that, it goes back
to the tree where it grew."

No sooner did Nārada conclude
than all the maids, who had heard it all,
ran to their mistresses, the seven other queens,
and told the story.

They were all downcast, but after a while
Lakṣaṇa thought, "Well, she is, after all,
the senior queen, so it's only fitting that she
have the flower." Kāḷindi put up with it.
Bhadra calmed down. Sudanta let it go.
Jāmbavati didn't want to bother.
Mitravinda kept her cool.

But Satya, the loveliest of all, and the most proud,
was thinking, "It's already late, and my maid,
who went to Kṛṣṇa, hasn't yet come back."

In her garden near the palace, where streams
of honey were flowing through crafted canals,

10. Satyabhāma

the queen was sitting on a moonstone sprinkled with red pollen,
talking to her friend about Kṛṣṇa and his beauty.[11]

"The soft music of the bees, the rustling of leaves
and the cuckoo's gentle song,
the sweet breeze blowing off the lotus ponds—all these no longer
hold my interest. I wonder why," she said to her friend.

"I don't know what has happened, but my right shoulder, nipple,
and eye
are quivering, and that's not good.[12] There is a certain sadness
in my mind. I'm scared. Maybe my dear husband
has found some other young woman, and is doing something
I won't like."

As she was speaking to her friend, suddenly
the maid appeared, eyes red with anger.

"My lady," she said, "what can I tell you?
Your husband was comfortably resting in Rukmiṇi's room
when that sage suddenly turned up

and gave him a special flower, which he described as flawless,
fit only for the gods, very useful for bringing pleasure,
and impossible for anyone to acquire.

Kṛṣṇa was wild with happiness. He took the flower,
pressed it to his eyes, bowed, and respectfully
presented it to Rukmiṇi; and that woman put it in her hair.

Suddenly she looked splendid, with an unexpected new glow
that can't be described, like Love's own sword
honed on a whetstone.

And Nārada did still worse. He said, so Kṛṣṇa could hear it,
and Rukmiṇi could hear, and I, too, heard:
"This is the end of Satya. She won't boast any more
that she's the best, most beloved, that there is no one like her.

Anybody who saw that busybody
and the airs Rukmiṇi put on
and the games Kṛṣṇa was playing
would be enraged."

11. This verse is clearly modeled after Potana's famous poem, "Far away in heaven," see p. 144.

12. For females, the quivering on the right side is inauspicious (for males, on the left).

Like a wounded snake, or like fire fed by ghee,
Satyabhāma stood up, eyes blazing, red
as the saffron designs she had painted on her cheeks.
Choked and stammering, she said:

"So. That meddler who feeds on quarrels came there
and talked like that. And that cowherd
listened closely. What did Rukmiṇi say?
Don't hide anything from me. Tell me the truth,
don't be shy.

I don't care if Nārada made a big thing of that flower
and gave it to Kṛṣṇa to ingratiate himself with him.
I don't even care that *he* gave it to the woman he likes.
But why should that tricky mendicant bring *me* into it?

It may be natural for him to wander around the worlds
tying people into knots with words.
But my husband—why did he let it happen?

Why blame the sage, or Rukmiṇi?
It's the crafty cowherd who's at fault.
If your husband treats you like this,
you'll eat your heart.

They don't look at their own doings, but they say
women's love can't be trusted. The fact is,
men's minds are fickle as an autumn cloud.
No one should rely on them.

For all these days, my husband has been so caring,
the way the eyelids protect the eye. If my position
among my co-wives is diminished, they'll start
winking and whispering about me. I'll never live
through that, unless dying is harder than I think.

Just to keep me in good spirits, for all these days
he's been playing games, and hiding his love
for Rukmiṇi. He gave no hint of this, and made me
very happy. I suppose I should thank him,
that killer of the demon Mura.

The sage brought a great flower to Kṛṣṇa,
and *he* gave it to that woman. I got the news,
and I'm still alive. What next?

He just happened to be in her house when the flower arrived,
so naturally he gave it to her. Let's say it makes sense.

But why should all my co-wives sell their pride,
their position, their self-respect, and their wisdom,
and rush to fall at her feet?

A woman needs luck, the fruit of many previous lives,
to find a man who will move through her mind
like a soft string through beads.

Even in dreams, even for a joke,
he was afraid to cross my word.
He never gave anything to anybody
before offering it first to me.
He used to bribe my maids
lest they turn my mind away from him.
He wouldn't let any other woman
claim to be my equal.
We were twined in affection
that knew no reserve, our desire for each other
unsated, always together
in honest affection. And now he does *this*
to me!

We used to play hide-and-seek in our make-believe caves.
We would play at marrying the tree and the vine.
When one of us would beat the other at a game of dice
and demand payment, we used to pull at each other's clothes.
At nightfall, we would watch together, very moved,
the poignant separation of the birds.[13]
And there were all those games in the moonlight,
and the hours spent resting on moonstones,
and painting each other's pictures on wooden boards.
Has he forgotten all of this, under Rukmiṇi's spell?

A husband is kin to the heart.
A husband is god, seven times a protector.[14]
If the husband crosses limits,
a good woman has nowhere to go.

If a husband gives away money,
that can be forgiven. But if he gives love
to another woman, can your heart survive?"

13. The *cakravāka* is separated each night from his mate, and the two birds spend the night crying piteously in sorrow and longing.

14. The husband is guru, father, mother, man, education, god, and patron for his wife.

She was hurt and fuming, so she went
to the Sulking Room, like a snake
to the sandalwood tree.

She put on a soiled sari, threw off her jewels,
all in silence. She tied a cloth around her head
over a layer of musk.[15] Then she started tossing and turning
on a cot in the dark room, in an agony of hurt love,
like the moon hidden by black clouds.

She gave herself entirely to suffering,
concentrated on being angry,
and stopped all other activities.

Meanwhile Kṛṣṇa was thinking: "That maid of Satya's
who happened to be here, and who came to know
about the flower I gave to Rukmiṇi, is probably
making up stories about me." A little worried,

he mounted his chariot, his thoughts unstable
as the flag that was waving above him,
and spurred his horses on. His mind was spinning
like an axle as he approached the golden palace
where Satya lived.

He got off, leaving Dāruka, his charioteer,
at the door. He walked through several courtyards,
noticing the silent space.

"Why is nobody feeding sugar to the parrots
in their golden cages and teaching to them to talk?
Why aren't they making the peacocks dance to their clapping?
Where is the music of the vina, plucked by sharp fingernails?
Why aren't they teaching the baby geese to walk?
Things are not as usual. The palace has lost its luster.
I wonder if somebody has told her the story
of the *pārijāta* flower."

Thinking to himself, he went straight to the Sulking Room,
where he found Satya lying down, covered by a veil.
Quietly he slipped in, but everybody could see his trick.

He sent the servants away—some by whispered advice,
some by an angry look, some by gesturing with his hand—

15. Musk is supposed to cure headache.

and drew near. He saw the woman, like a vine wilted
by the harsh rays of the noonday sun. He was surprised.

"Let's see what's going on," thought the Tricky Cowherd to himself
as he quietly stood behind her bed and picked up the fan
that a maid was using to cool her. He fanned her himself,
as if to ignite the desire hidden in her body.

The perfume of *pārijāta* was wafted from his body, and she could
sense
that something had changed. Surprised, she lifted the veil and looked
all around the room, until at last she saw her husband
with a fan in his hands. Tears welled up in her eyes,

and she bent her head and put back the veil. The tears
were flowing down her cheeks like drops of honey
spilling out of flowers onto the leaves.

Her feelings hurt, she was wholly gripped
by anger. He spoke to her from his heart:

"My sweet, where are your jewels?
You always like those light-rose saris—
why are you wearing white?
Where is the betel that should brighten
the redness of your lips? Something
must be wrong. Tell me what happened.

Is this a way of testing me, to make sure
I love you? Or is this a joke meant to scare me?
Did I do something really wrong? I'm not your enemy,
am I? Why are you treating me like this?
If you don't look at me with love
even for a moment, I can't go on living.

In thought, word, and deed, I give no love
to any other woman. It's only for the sake of appearances
that I show them some respect. My real passion is only
for you. All my pride is in obeying your command.
Surely you know this is true.

If I'm not fortunate enough to get a kiss from you,
or an embrace, at least give me a glance
from your long, shining eyes." And with this,
he lifted up the veil, impatient.
She tried to hit him with the lotus she was holding in her hand.

He saw there was no way to appease the anger in her heart.
Nothing was working. So the lord of all the worlds,
who pulls all the strings, bowed at her feet, their gentle redness
enhancing the colors of all the jewels in his crown.

She kicked him with her left foot,
right on the head—the head of God, honored
by all other gods. That's how it is.
When the husband errs, the wife is usually too furious
to be sensible.

Kicked by this angry woman, Kṛṣṇa felt a thrill
and the rising flame of desire.
He spoke to her, putting his love into words.

"I am deeply honored to have been kicked
by Your Highness, in loving anger. My only worry
is that my bristling hairs might have hurt
your ever-so-tender foot. Please don't be angry any more."

She half rose from the bed. She kept straightening
her loose hair, tucking it back into the knot,
and replacing the sari on her breasts. There were beads
of sweat on her face, and her lovely eyes looked a little
threatening, and her lips were shaking.

"These slick words are too much. It's all pretense.
This is what I get for trusting you. You don't even see
how everyone is mocking me. But how could a cowherd know
anything of the niceties of love?

I'll never trust you again. You don't have to keep poking at me.
I've lost my taste for your graceless lies. Rukmiṇi probably treasures
them
like life itself. You lover of cowherd girls: I've had more
than enough. Don't make me any angrier.
Stop pretending.

Tricks and lies were born along with you.
You sucked them in with your mother's milk.
I know that, but still, like a fool, I loved you.
Now I've lost all self-respect. What am I to do?

The sage came and gave you a flower and also praised
your dear wife. You were pleased to hear that, and now
you have to listen to my insipid words. You come here
reeking of *pārijāta,* just to belittle me.

A woman's jewel is her pride,
more precious than life. Pride
is the basis of all honor. How can a woman live
if she loses pride?

Your mother Devaki has always treated me as the best
of all her daughters-in-law—because you loved me.
Now how can I see her again?

I wonder which of them will inherit this *syamantaka*[16] gem,
that I have worn on my head. Which one will get to make love to you
in *our* caves on Raivataka Hill? Who gets the room in the Spring
Palace
with all the camphor bananas? Who will watch the waves with you
from the windows of the palace of jewels? Those parrots and peacocks
and mynahs that I raised—I guess they'll go to some other woman.
Don't worry, I've sworn to make you happy
even before they all start laughing at me.

Who do you think I am?"
Then she could speak no more, her head bent low,
tears choked back, the words stuttered and blocked.

With grief and anger from hurt pride in her heart,
she started weeping, right in front of her husband,
her splendid face hidden by the sari, her soft voice
made still sweeter by her tears, like a cuckoo that has feasted
on astringent leaves.

She couldn't control her sobbing, and the pain was getting worse.
He took her in his arms, consoled her, wiped away the tears
with his fingers. He said in sweet and friendly words:

"Why are you sad, my lovely bride (I love your hair,
darker than blue diamonds)?
All this just for a flower? I'm here for you.
Listen. I will go to Indra's garden. I don't care
if Indra himself tries to stop me. I'll bring
the whole *pārijāta* tree just for you.

You know where you like to play,
near the pond with its cool lilies. Right there,

16. Satayabhāma wears the famous jewel for which Kṛṣṇa fought Jāmbavān. She is, of course, now threatening suicide and manipulatively portraying a world without her.

in the middle of those camphor bananas,
I'll have it planted, in your own backyard."

He said this in that deep, sweet voice of his,
and Satya brightened up
like a tree that flowers in spring,
with peacocks dancing round.

[The remaining cantos narrate Kṛṣṇa's war with Indra for the *pārijāta* tree, which he eventually brings to Dvāraka as promised—to Satyabhāma's satisfaction.]

FOURTEEN

Dhūrjaṭi

Sixteenth century

It is difficult to disentangle Dhūrjaṭi from the literary legend of Kṛṣṇadevarāya's eight great poets, the *aṣṭa-dig-gajas,* with whom the king-poet is supposed to have spent most of his time in a pavilion called *bhuvana-vijaya,* "conquest of the world."[1]

There is clearly a powerful investment in this legend—a poet's fantasy of constant royal attention. Within the framework of this tale, Dhūrjaṭi, always named as one of the eight, undergoes a conversion or transformation from court poet to temple poet. Sickened by life at court, he is supposed to have headed for the temple of Śiva at Kāḷahasti, in the southern reaches of the Andhra land. His *Kāḷahastîśvara-śátakamu* poignantly embodies his introspective vision and rejection of life in the world. Along with this expressive text, however, Dhūrjaṭi composed a *kāvya* on Kāḷahasti—the *Kāḷahasti-māhātmyamu*—lyrically narrating the main purāṇic stories about this remarkable temple. We have translated a section of this text, in which the Kāḷahasti tradition appropriates and recycles a well-known Tamil story from Madurai about the great classical poet Nakkīrar and *his* "conversion," which is similar to Dhūrjaṭi's.[2]

Dhūrjaṭi was the son of Jakkayya Nārāyaṇa and Siṅgamma. This is the sole hard biographical fact we possess about him. For the rest, we are left to construct a biography from the highly personal tones of his *śataka*—assuming that these verses are indeed by a single hand, that of the author of the

1. This structure is, in fact, mentioned by Pĕddana, *Manu-caritramu* (Hyderbad: Andhra Pradesh Sahitya Akademi, 1966), 1.13.

2. On the early history of the story of Nakkīrar/Natkīra, see Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman *A Poem at the Right Moment: Remembered Verses from Premodern South India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 174–80 and sources cited there.

Kāḷahasti-māhātmyamu. In this light, Dhūrjaṭi is the first Telugu poet to produce what could be called an entirely subjective poem, exploring the interior feelings of a single, integrated person. Something of this same subjective force is also apparent in his description of Nakkīrar's agony in the *māhātmyamu.*

THE STORY OF NATKĪRA[3]

There is a city named Madhurāpura, home to the Beautiful God[4] of Vālavāy[5]
who played sixty-four games in disguise.[6] The god's queen, Fish-Eyes,[7]
born from the earth, has her main palace there.
In the Golden-Lotus Pond there is a plank made of conch,
the seat of Tamil language.[8] Here, too, the Vaigha flows,
a rival to the Tāmraparṇi for the love of the southern ocean.
This city blunts the power of evil, since it is the heaven
of Beautiful Viṣṇu from Kūḍal, who worshiped Black-Neck Śiva
with his eye.[9] So bounteous is its wealth that even a miser
would give up his greed.

What city could compare with Madhura,
where Śiva, with the moon on his head,
became son-in-law to the Pāṇḍya king,
thrilling his people?

3. Dhūrjaṭi, *Śrī Kāḷahasti-māhātmyamu* (Madras: Vavilla Ramasvamisastrulu and Sons, 1966), 3.131–33, 141–42, 144–49, 155–79, 193–96, 199–221.

4. Cŏkkeśa, the Tamil name for Śiva-Sundareśvara.

5. One of the ancient names for Madurai is (Tamil) Ālavāy (Sanskritized as Hālâsya, "Poison-Mouth"—i.e., Śiva.) The Telugu poet has assimilated the name as Vālavāy, perhaps under the impact of Tamil Tiru(v)ālavāy.

6. The sixty-four amusements (Tamil *viḷaiyāṭal*) of Śiva at Madurai.

7. Mīnâksi (here: Mīnekṣaṇa).

8. This is a Telugu expansion and reformulation of the Tamil legend of the Caṅkam, the Academy of Poets that sat in Madurai. *Caṅkam* (from Sanskit *saṅgha*) has now become *śankha-phalaka,* a plank made of conch. Medieval Tamil legend also speaks of the plank floating in the Golden-Lotus Pond, where there was room only for real poets. Dhūrjaṭi refers to Tamil as *Drāviḍa-bhāṣa.*

9. Viṣṇu served Śiva with a thousand lotuses each day. Once one flower was missing, so he tore out one of his beautiful, lotus-shaped eyes to make up the lack. (For this act of devotion, Viṣṇu was given the discus named Sudarśana, "lovely eye.") Beautiful Viṣṇu is here Aḻaghaya from Tami Aḻākar, Viṣṇu in Madurai. Kūḍal is another old name for Madurai, an abbreviation of Nāṉ-māṭa-kkūṭal, "the juncture of four great buildings (temples)."

Śiva, crowned with the Ganges,
killed Desire and made Pleasure a widow
with a deadly glance from the corner of his eye.
The fish-eyed goddess, Aṅgayakannamba,[10]
revived Desire and gave Pleasure a husband again
with one gentle glance.

On Sandalwood Mountain, Agastya, born from a pot,[11]
thought of creating a grammar for Tamil, a lexicon,
and a set of rules for writing poetry, complete with tropes and figures.[12]
He wrote the eighteen primary syllables[13] on a clean slate
made of conch and brought it to the Pāṇḍya king.
"This is the path of Tamil poetry," he said. "It will make room
for any number of poets, if they are worthy
of the goddess of learning. And if there is only one
such poet, it will give just enough space
for him to sit. Guard it well, for all generations."

After Agastya gave this gift, innumerable
Pāṇḍya kings came and went, until,
in this last age, a king was born in that dynasty.

He chose twelve gifted poets, with Natkīra at their head,
who made the goddess of Tamil still more beautiful
with the power to weave words into poems
that live forever. They could play
with knowledge of God as geese play in a pond.
They deserved to be seated on that wide plank
for poetry, so he honored them with many gifts.

If any poet could make a poem to the standards
of this assembly, the king would reward him
with a thousand gold coins, presented
with his own hands. He became famous for his good rule,

10. Tamil Aṅkayaṟkaṇṇammai, the Goddess with Eyes Lovely as the Carp (Sanskrit Mīnâkṣī).

11. Agastya sits on a mountain near the southern tip of the subcontinent. Here this mountain is identified with the Malayâcala of southwestern India. Agastya was born when Mitra and Varuṇa ejaculated into a pot upon glimpsing the divinely beautiful Ūrvaśi.

12. This tripartite division seems to correspond to the Tamil categorization of grammar: *ĕḻuttu* = phonology, *cŏl* = morphology (but literally "words"), and *pŏruḷ* = meaning/poetics.

13. The Tamil consonants?

but then a famine began, because the planets changed their course,
and the world was without rain.

Saturn entered Pisces, a comet appeared in the east,
clouds massed at noon. There were early-morning sprinkles
every day, but by night the skies were clear.
The sun shone dimly, and heavy breezes blew,
but real rain never came. The new moon
was shorter at one end. During Virgo's days,
no storms broke out, and even thunder was silent
in Makha[14]— except in the south, the realm of death.
The monsoon failed.

As the famine became worse, people lost hope
of surviving. Many died, burning with hunger.
A few fled to other countries, just to stay alive.

In this state of man-eat-man, a certain Brahmin priest
in the main Śiva shrine could no longer
go on. He decided to leave, but the god felt compassion.

Tenderly, Śiva gave him a Tamil poem he had composed, couched in the poetic mode of erotic love, about the king of that land. "If you recite this, the king will give you a bag with a thousand gold coins," he said. "It will provide for your expenses, and you'll be able to live happily. Then the famine will be over; rain will fall; crops will grow; and people will rejoice." So the Brahmin went to the king and recited that marvelous verse authored by the god. The poem implied that a graceful woman's hair has a natural fragrance.[15]

Natkīra was sitting in the court, and burst out laughing.
"How ridiculous to say that a woman's hair

14. A twenty-two-day period when the Sun enters an asterism; in this case, a rainy period.

15. The poem around which this story is told is *Kuṟuntōkai* 2, addressed to a bee; the colophon ascribes the verse to Iṟaiyaṉār (i.e., God):

> You who spend your life in flight,
> seeking a hidden sweetness:
> don't tell me what I want to hear,
> tell me what you really see.
> I love a woman, love everything
> about her—the way she walks,
> just like a peacock; her teeth;
> her long dark hair
> more fragrant, I think, than any flower—
> but only you can say.

is naturally fragrant. The whole world will laugh
in a thousand ways.

It's wrong. You can't say that. It goes against
poetic convention. How can you compose
something like this?" The Brahmin was humiliated
and said, "That great god composed the poem
himself, about the king, and gave it to me.
I don't know what's right or wrong."

And he went right back to the god
and returned the poem: "I trusted you,
went to the court, and was put to shame.
Need I say more?

If a person has some skill of his own
and displays it in a court, he'll win fame.
But if someone is dependent on borrowed learning,
will he be honored by a king?

How can I describe what I suffered
because I believed your words? They say
you take care of those who believe in you,
but even the famine was better
than Natkīra's abuse.

This is just my luck. I don't want to blame
either you or Natkīra. It's all the fault
of the famine. I'll go away somewhere or other
and beg for my belly. When it's all over,
I'll come back. My blessings on you,
I'll take my leave."

But the god stopped him. "Well, well!
That Natkīra? That two-bit poet?
He found fault with my poem? Let's go
find out." So Śiva came, with his third eye,
straight to the court of the king.

"I made a poem about this king
and sent it here, a poem lit
with sweetness, exquisitely composed.
Natkīra must have been jealous
to find fault with it for no good reason.
Tell me what is wrong—is it the meter?
The figures? The syntax? The feeling?"

Natkīra restated his objection. The three-eyed god
said to him, "My wife's thick, long hair
is naturally sweet."

"You might be right about Pārvati,"
replied Natkīra. "But when it comes to human women,
it won't work. Stop arguing. You can't refute
empirical evidence with unfalsifiable fantasies,
like flowers growing in the sky.[16]

Enough nonsense." By now Śiva was angry
and wished to reveal who he was, so he opened
his third eye.

"You may have eyes all over your head,
but a mistake is a mistake. Your magical tricks
will get you nowhere. Your poem is wrong,"
said Natkīra.

Because he was talking back,
Rudra cursed him: "Suffer the agonies
of leprosy." Now Natkīra was scared to death,
and he said:

"Swami! I have sinned against you. Tell me,
compassionate god, how this curse will end."
And he fell at his feet. The god, who cares
for those who give themselves, was appeased. "Don't worry,
just by looking at Kailāsa Mountain, you'll be healed."
Natkīra was still depressed:

"Why was I so adamant about poetry?
I could have sat there quietly
like the other poets on the plank,
but no—I had to argue with God
like an atheist.[17] How can I bear
this hideous disease? When will I see
the Silver Mountain?

How many rivers, forests, mountains,
wild villages will I have to pass,

16. *Gagana-prasūna-vāda,* "a claim about flowers in the sky," is a stock example for unverifiable statements.

17. Literally, *cārvākamu*—the materialist heresy.

how many animals will I have to face,
how many lonely paths will I have to walk
before I can see Śiva's mountain?
No one has seen it, no one knows
where it is.

There are lions, tigers, wild elephants,
rhinoceroses, and all those fabled beasts,
to say nothing of the demons,
on those routes; snowstorms, too,
and cutting rocks. Can anyone travel
that way? Śiva, flowing with mercy,
what shall I do?

Soon my body will lose sensation.
Then black spots will appear all over.
The skin will thicken, and blisters will break out.
I will feel weakened, and turn ugly.
Flies will hover around my oozing pus and blood.
People will turn away in disgust when I beg for food.
So let me go now, while I can still walk,
to look for Kailāsa. There is no escaping
God's words."

And Natkīra headed north, letting go of his worries,
like a rain cloud drained of water. In the south,
the other poets brightened up, like the lotus
after rain.

[Natkīra proceeded north, visiting great shrines and rivers along the way —Tiruvāṉaikkā, Tiruvaṇṇāmalai, Tiruvattūr, Kāñcipuram, Nĕllūru, the Godāvarī, Piṭhāpuram/Kukkuṭeśvara, Siṃhâcalam, Śrīkūrmam, Pūri and other Orissan shrines, Gaya, and Benares.]

After walking all this way, he could walk no more.
He came to a stop, holding his side, in the middle
of nowhere. He sat down, leaning over.
He pulled himself a bit farther, then started rolling
on the ground, each foot gained like a mile.
Pus and blood were oozing from his body,
and flies were swarming everywhere. He was in
a forest set amidst tall mountains, unpeopled,
teeming with cruel animals, and he could see
no help in his misery. Right in front of him,
Natkīra, prince of poets,

saw a lotus pond dusted with pollen,
like pervasive passion;
fragrant, like hidden memories
from former births;
buds unfolding like layers of our bodily being;
waves rippling like conflicting desires—
an image of life itself.

Geese played there, like yogis immersed in God.
It was deep beyond imagining, complete
and singular, like truth.

[On its bank stood a huge banyan tree.] In its shade,
Natkīra rested peacefully. As he watched, sitting there,
the leaves from that tree that fell down on the open ground
became birds, and those that fell into the water
became fish. But one leaf fell half in water and half
on land; half fish, half bird, it pulled both inward
and outward. Natkīra lost himself
in the feeling of wonder.

With cruel, staring eyes, with fangs and bristling hair,
body dark as a storm cloud, unsettling noises like
raucous laughter, a jackal's cries from the throat,
a terrible weapon in his hand, and human bones
clattering on his neck, a hideous demon

grabbed him and threw him into a cave,
where other captives were jostling
one another like birds
in a net.

He wanted to eat them all at once.
Kicking a rock in place to close the entrance
to that cave, he went off to bathe quickly
in the pond.

The people imprisoned there looked at Natkīra and said:

"What to do? God has lost all compassion
for us, since he brought you here. Now this demon
will eat us all. Here is how.

He grinds up human beings and gulps them down
before your eyes, but fewer than a hundred
won't make a mouthful. He's been collecting,

and today, with you, we are a hundred.
All our days are at an end. Some god should save us now."

Natkīra thought it over. "There is a cure
for this. Śiva's son Kumāra,[18] Tāraka's killer,
is here for me, so what reason is there
to fear?

You destroyed Tāraka. Holding your spear,
you ride a peacock that devours snakes. For those in trouble,
you're the tree of life. When you laugh, from all six faces,
the ends of the universe explode. Grab this demon
and kill him; save everyone here.

Is killing a demon hard for you, who are famous
for your war with Tāraka? Is a mountain cave
any obstacle, after you split the Krauñca Mountain
with your spear, like a lightning bolt? You relieve
even gods of their pain, so ending our terror
should be simple."

This is how he praised Subrahmaṇya, reminding him that a Brahmin should not be killed. The god, his heart overflowing, set off with furious speed. He pinned the demon to the ground and, with a flick of his hand, threw off the rock that blocked the cave. "Everybody out," he said, and all of them, overjoyed, bowed to Śiva's son and went their respective ways. But Natkīra just stood there, with folded hands. Subrahmaṇya smiled and asked, "What brought you to this place?" Natkīra answered:

"I made a mistake, and Śiva cursed me to suffer
this disease, worse than any other. He also set an end
to the curse—when I see his home, the Silver Mountain.
But the way there is impassable. What can I do?

How can I see Mount Kailāsa? Until I do, I'll see no end
to this stormy ocean of disease."

The secret god[19] replied: "Śiva may have said Kailāsa,
but he didn't specify the Kailāsa of the North.

18. Skanda-Subrahmaṇya (Tamil Murukaṉ), the six-headed god who killed the demon Tāraka in the Kraũnca Mountain.

19. Guha, a name of Subrahmaṇya—mentioned here, perhaps, because of the secret power he is about to use.

The Southern Kailāsa will do just as well.
That will heal you." And, after pondering the best way
to bring Natkīra there,

he hid his own power within the lake and addressed
the prince of poets: "Bathe in this lake, and Kailāsa will come
searching for you, as the proverb says."[20]

It was music to Natkīra's ears. With full awareness, he bathed
in the pond. By the time he lifted his head out of the water,
that mountain of Śiva from the south came walking toward him,
along with its river, the Song of Gold.

The leprosy was gone. He came near that Kailāsa
on the banks of the Song of Gold. Bathing in its waves,
he composed a Tamil song, a hundred verses,
to Śiva, first of all the gods.[21]

Pleased with these hundred verses,
the lord of Kāḷahasti, father of Kumāra
and husband of the goddess Fragrant with Wisdom,[22]
the god who cares for those in trouble,

revealed himself and said, "Your life
has been fruitful, master of poetic speech.
I'll give you whatever you choose. Ask,
I'll make you free from fear." Natkīra bowed
again and again to the god, his mind pulsing with joy.

He brought his hands together over his forehead
and tried to speak, but the words were choked
and fumbling in his ecstasy. Emotion and eloquence
struggled with one another as he prayed:

"Joy, in life, is never unmixed
with pain. That special happiness
one gets by letting go of the world—
make that mine."

20. *Āḍabovu tīrtham′ ĕduraina rīti:* "You're planning a pilgrimage, and the shrine comes to you." (Cf. M. W. Carr, *A Collection of Telugu Proverbs* (reprinted New Delhi and Madras: Asian Educational Services, 1989), no. 174).

21. This is a reference to the *Kayilaipati kāḷattipati antâti* ascribed to Nakkīrateva Nāyaṇār, in the 11th volume of the Tamil Śaiva canon (fifty verses on Kailāsa intermingled with fifty verses on Kāḷahasti).

22. Jñānaprasūnâmbika, Pārvatī at Kāḷahasti.

FIFTEEN

Tĕnāli Rāmakṛṣṇa

Mid–sixteenth century

An outstanding figure in the literary world of the sixteenth century, Tĕnāli Rāmakṛṣṇa was the son of a Śaiva priest, Gārlapāṭi Rāmayya, who served in the temple of Rāmaliṅgeśvarasvāmi in Tĕnāli. The son was named after this deity. His earliest work was probably the *Udbhaṭârādhya-caritramu,* where he calls himself Tĕnāli Rāmaliṅga; the book is dedicated to Ūra Decayya, an employee of Nādĕḷḷa Gopamantri, the commander of the Kŏṇḍavīḍu fort under the Vijayanagara kings (and a nephew of the famous Timmarasu, the minister of Kṛṣṇadevarāya). The *Ghaṭikâcala-māhātmyamu* narrates the stories of the Śaiva shrine at Ghaṭikâcala (Sholinagar in Maharashtra); the *Pāṇḍuraṅga-māhātmyamu* offers a Telugu version of the tradition centered on Viṭṭhala-Viṣṇu at Paṇḍharpūr (also in Maharashtra). In both the latter works, the poet names himself Rāmakṛṣṇa. It is possible that this change in name reflects a conversion from Śaivism to Vaiṣṇavism, as is also suggested by the shift from a Śaiva to a Vaiṣṇava cultic focus in the poet's works. Śiva, however, remains an internal narrator of the *Pāṇḍuraṅga-māhātmyamu,* as we see in the story translated below.

The *Pāṇḍuraṅga-māhātmyamu* is dedicated to Virūri Vedâdri-mantri, a small official (*rāyasam,* a scribe) working for the local ruler Saṅgarāju in Pŏttapi-nāḍu near Kāḷahasti in the second half of the sixteenth century.[1] The scope and prominence of this text reflects the rise of the Viṭṭhala-Viṭhoba cult in Andhra during the first half of this century; there is a famous

1. There is some debate about this date, and literary legend connects this poet to the famous circle of poets under Kṛṣṇadevarāya. We have approximate dates for the poet's guru, Baṭṭaru Cikkâcāryulu (mentioned in *Pāṇḍuraṅga-māhātmyamu* 1.17), supporting the later dating. Tĕnāli Rāmakṛṣṇa refers obliquely both to *Āmukta-mālyada* and to *Vasu-caritramu,* as if relating himself to an existing canon.

Viṭṭhaleśvara temple at Hampi, perhaps begun under the Sāḷuva dynasty but completed by the Tuḷuva kings.[2] Although Tĕnāli Rāmakṛṣṇa does not mention this temple, he does give an elaborate version of the Viṭṭhala mythology, including elements apparently unique to this Telugu vision of the cult. He claims to be following the story of Kṛṣṇa as told in the *Skanda-purāṇa*—no doubt a Sanskrit *māhātmya* text on Paṇḍharpūr—but his stories of Nigama-śarma and the brothers Ayuta and Niyuta seem to have no antecedents. These are masterpieces of narrative poetry, rich in humorous touches and moments of deep lyricism, such as in the hymn of praise (*stotra*) to Narasiṃha toward the end of the section we have translated.

Stray verses from two further works by this poet—*Kandarpa-ketu vilāsamu* and *Hari-līlā-vilāsamu*—are quoted by Pedapāṭi Jagganna in his *Prabandha-ratnâkaramu;* neither work is extant.

There is an arid debate among Telugu scholars about the identity of this poet as Tĕnāli Rāmaliṅgaḍu, the famous court jester associated by the popular *cāṭu* tradition with Kṛṣṇadevarāya. This identification has nothing to recommend it.

ON BECOMING A FROG[3]

[Śiva narrates the following story to Nārada in response to a question about how various householders achieved release:]

If the wife you married doesn't nag,
and your son doesn't talk back,
and your brothers get along well with you,
and your daughter-in-law doesn't grumble,
and your daughter doesn't compromise her character,
and you are not burdened by debts,
and you don't lose pride by serving others,
and you don't suffer scandal,
and you can get rich honestly,
and you are gracious to guests,
and there is respect for the gods in your home,
there's nothing better than a householder's life.

2. See George Michell, *Architecture and Art of Southern India: Vijayanagara and the Successor States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 13, 39.46–48.

3. Tĕnāli Rāmakṛṣṇa, *Pāṇḍuraṅga-māhātmyamu* (Madras: Vavilla Ramasvamisastrulu and Sons, 1968), 5.166–73, 178–93, 195–213, 215—19, 223–26, 228–33, 236, 239, 245–53, 255–56, 258, 260–62, 275, 277–280, 283, 285–86, 288–91, 295–97, 301–3, 309, 311, 313–14, 316.

There is a story that effectively proves this point.
Just listen.

Before that time when the Vindhya Mountain
decided to rise above the stars,[4]
Agastya, born from a pot,[5] was living in Kāśi[6]
in a simple hut.

He had thousands of disciples, their hearts always open to serve him. Among them were the two sons of the sage Prayuta, named Ayuta and Niyuta, who were particularly beloved of Agastya. One day he was thinking about them:

"Among my disciples, these two
are rich in wisdom, elegant, and infallible
with discrimination and eloquence, patience and serenity.
They love me. I should take care of them,
and get them married.

They pay no heed to clothing, hunger, or thirst.
They don't worry if their hair is unkempt, or their bodies weary.
More important, they will sit from morning until evening,
and from night to dawn, reciting chants,
never slipping toward sleep.

You can't find women suited to them
anywhere on earth, but Brahmā has two
unmarried daughters. Let me bring them."

So he went to the world of Brahmā [and woke up the god with a song of praise.]

When Brahmā learned the reason for his coming
from his lucid speech, he said: "You don't even have to ask.
This is nothing very big." And he gave the sage his two daughters,
Gāyatri and Sāvitri, whom he had created in his mind
as the pinnacle of feminine beauty. Agastya took them home
and informed Ayuta and Niyuta of his plan. But Ayuta
refused to marry, so Niyuta got them both.

4. The ambition of the Vindhya Mountain is a decisive event in the life of the sage Agastya, who, on his journey to the south of India, manages to bring the towering mountain back down to size. The story narrated here is placed *before* this sequence.

5. Agastya was born when Mitra and Varuṇa ejaculated into a pot upon glimpsing the divinely beautiful Ūrvaśi.

6. Varanasi/Benares.

Agastya was very angry that Ayuta would not take
the girl and that he disobeyed his command,
so he threw him out of his house with terrible words.

Niyuta loved both his wives in equal measure.
Though their curls were black as night, their thoughts were clear as moonlight.
Their lips were red with passion, but their hearts were wise with dispassion.
Their breasts swelled with pride, yet their wishes were humble.
They moved with languor, but inside they were swift and lucid.
And while their stunning eyes were quick with movement, their minds remained still.

Meanwhile, Ayuta, hurt by his teacher's rejection,
went off in the direction of the Himâlayas, and he was thinking:

"Parrots, gentle breezes, moonlight, bees—
these weapons of Desire are forged to fury
only by women. Without taking them on,
some foolish sages think
they are free.

What we have is matted hair. What we wear
is the antelope's skin. Our upper cloth
is dyed red. How can a sage who lives through hardship
in the wilderness be together with
a woman who seeks pleasure?

If he asked me to jump off a mountain, I would do it.
I just won't climb over a woman's breasts.
I could bear the pain of pointed arrows, if he asked me.
What I cannot bear is a woman's glance.
I don't mind if he drowns me in a whirlpool,
but he can't ask me to lose myself in a woman's deep navel.
I can lay my hands on a vicious black snake, if he tells me to;
what I won't touch is a woman's pubic hair.
Is there anything the guru asks that I wouldn't do?
My very limbs are his property. Still, he shouldn't make me
have a woman, like a fanatic who forces you
to bear the sign of his god.[7]

7. Literally, like a *jaṅgama*—a Śaiva ascetic—who forces someone to wear the *liṅga,* Śiva's sign. Recall that the *Pāṇḍuraṅga-māhātmyamu* is a Vaiṣṇava text.

My brother Niyuta is cut out for this work, but for me
there's nothing worse than being married. I refuse to hang myself
just to please my teacher." And Ayuta took a vow to be celibate.

He rid himself of inner jealousy and longing.
True being shone through his mind, as if reflected in a polished
mirror.
With the tenacity of a tiger, he disciplined his heart,
and his body, like an untouched flower, blazed with fire.

Soon the whole world was on fire with fear
of this Brahmin, whose courage knew no limit.

The sun started blinking, and the earth shivered.
Oceans overflowed, and the heavens
showered sparks.

Like someone who walks on fire,
or who was bitten by a scorpion,
or who has swallowed too much mustard,
Indra, king of heaven, was in agony
because of this young man's vow.
So he took the form of an old Brahmin
and came down to earth to put a stop to it.

One disciple carried his *pūjā* box and texts wrapped in old antelope
skins.
Another bore his blanket, mat, stool, ocher clothes, and water pot.
A third brought tamarind, barley, rice, and lentils.
Yet another was in charge of firewood, bamboo containers of ghee,
darbha grass, and ladles for the fire-offering.
They were also dragging an old cow by a halter, followed by a calf,
as they entered Ayuta's domain, as guests.

And there was an old woman with them, with grey hair, her head
shaking,
as if Indra's body could not fully contain Old Age and had let it out in
this form
that followed him, barely hanging on.

Indra, dressed as a pilgrim traveling with his fire, a skilled actor, rested a bit on the porch of a hut in that hermitage, which was full of Ayuta's burning power. He performed the midday rituals and the sacrifice of breaths.[8] He let the cow rest, too, along with his disciples. Toward

8. The *prāṇâgnihotra.*

evening, as the heat of the sun diminished, he got ready to go out to the riverbank for the evening prayers. By this time Ayuta had emerged from his deep meditation, and Indra went to see him. Ayuta honored him as a guest, offered him a seat, and inquired about the reason for his visit. The false pilgrim said:

"Our home is where the gods live. Flowing with beauty,[9] it is shaded by *pārijāta* trees and others, endlessly fruitful, on the slopes of the Himâlaya. Only passion, greed, and anger fail to grow there.

Of all paths, family life is definitely the best.
With that in mind, and much patience,
I am making my way through all the holy places
on earth, since this body
doesn't last, does it,
you who stand fast in your discipline?

I have been to Kāñci, Śeṣagiri,[10] Śrīraṅgam,
Prayāga, Gaya, Siṃhâcalam, and Pūri with its wooden god.

Traveling around, I heard about the single god
who grants all wishes, the dice-player
with an extra eye,[11] the Butter-Thief
who is father to Desire,
Viṭṭhala of Pāṇḍuraṅga.

I am on my way, together with my disciples, to serve that god. And who, may I ask, are you? What do you seek, that makes you burn up the world with such fearsome practice? You child of ascetics, your heart, which has driven you to the point of torturing your body, must be hard and dry. I am sorry to say this: my mouth blisters with the words. Please tell me exactly how it is."

Ayuta replied:

"My father is Prayuta, and my name
is Ayuta. Niyuta is my younger brother.
I am a disciple of Agastya, of amazing power.

He cared for us with cool compassion
among all his disciples, magnificent as mountains.

9. There is a pun here: *viśadâpsaramun,* "with lovely dancing girls" or "filled with clean water."

10. Tirupati, where the snake Ādiśeṣa became the mountain range.

11. *Ĕccukaṇṭivāni,* but in standard iconography Viṭṭhala does not seem to have a third eye. This phrase is obscure.

Then, one day, this guru of ours—
who is also our patron, our god, our mother and father,
who filled us with incomparable knowledge—
showed us two girls, daughters of Brahmā,
with faces smiling like flowers, like arrows
of Love.

He told us he had brought them for the two of us,
and that we should marry them, the eldest first.

But I turned my face away, because I know
that all women are bad news.

I said a few things, talked back to him,
and he was angry: his topknot came undone,
his eyes were smoking, he was breathing hard,
and his heart wilted like a flower.

Shivering and sweating, he was about to curse me,
but he held back, like a snake that is about to bite
but suddenly stops. A Brahmin's anger lasts
only as long as his topknot stays tied.

He threw me out and married my brother
to both those girls, bodies
glistening like gold.

As for me, I touched my head
to be sure it wasn't scalded by my teacher's fury,
bubbling like water boiled to cook rice,
and, terribly afraid, I left home at once.

Now I have cooled all poisonous passions
and devoted myself to the discipline of celibacy
to reach the true goal of freedom."

The old man laughed, and a mercurial smile[12]
made his aged face look young as he gently
shook his head and said, with cunning:

"I know your father: he's my friend.
Everyone admires his strength and lineage.
It's a joy to my eyes to see his elder son,
but the odd things you have said
are needles in my ears.

12. *Dara-hāsa-rasamunan,* with a pun on *rasa:* "feeling" and "mercury," the alchemical elixir of youth.

You have abandoned family tradition,
made your teacher angry, and left your friends and brothers
and your own native place. Do you want to hang out here
all alone, like a bag hung from the ceiling?
It's impossible, you know, to keep the butter of wisdom
from melting, once desire ignites.

The Love God has melted down
the hearts of sages dead as rock.
Do you think he'll have a problem
softening a young heart like yours,
that overflows at a touch of moonlight?

Look at Janaka[13] and other masters:
they enjoyed their palaces, decked themselves with jewels,
were adored by loving women, dressed in fancy clothes,
ate good food, perfumed themselves, lived love to its limit,
and still they found that joy you seek.

The best poets have sung over and over
of women's beauty, but have never found its end.
Your mind is dead set
against it. How will you ever know
the joy that body gives to body
when you fully wake to love?

When milk comes to you from the cowpen,
and the crops are ripening in the fields,
and there are weddings and other happy times,
when you can help those who come in need,
and your servants do their work, and relatives come and go,
and the whole village grows through your goodness,
and you are honored to bear true witness
as you celebrate the moments each day brings,
and your wife feeds you what has first been offered
to the god—this is freedom.
Freedom is not like sleeping or like dying
into rock."

Ayuta refused to let these words enter his heart.
Stubbornly, he replied:

"You're the type who would correct the Creator himself,
who has the Goddess of Learning on his tongue. And if you

13. The king who appears in Upaniṣadic texts as an enlightened sage.

go wrong, who can correct you? When a river in spate
takes a wrong turn, who can make it straight?

But why blame me and not the man who threw me out
for no good reason? Can't you see that he's the one
whose heart has gone dry?

You spoke with no sympathy for freedom, the sage's wealth.
You keep on celebrating family life, pale as a fleck of ash.
Can an insect become a lion? Is glass a precious stone?
Can poison berries make you happy
like the wish-fulfilling tree? Why keep insisting?

Family life is fine—if you have money.
And the only way to have money is by good *karma*
from a former birth. And once you have the money,
it makes you crazy, no matter how wise you are.
Don't kill me, and don't throw dust in my eyes
with these charming, lethal tales.

With phrases like "arrows of Desire,"
"lithe as lightning," "honeyed streams,"
"golden vines," and so on,
educated people damn women
with praise. These full-lipped ladies can give you
no more than the shadow of pleasure, never
the light of joy.

In your eyes, their hair is always dark as blue sapphire,
their breasts taut as mountain peaks,
the light in their face like the full moon.
Some ascetic you are!
What happens when they get old,
white, sagging, and wrinkled?"

In this way, for every argument of the sage, Ayuta gave ten in reply;
and for every ten, he offered a hundred. Pleased with his firmness
but also angry, the god in disguise gave way:

"Nothing I say has any effect: it's like teaching a coward to fight,
or a miser to be generous, or a hunter to feel kindness, or a eunuch
to be aroused. I give up. Can you beat knowledge into a fool?
Who can turn back a stream pouring down a mountain?
Anyone who can swallow a whole temple
can easily chew up the doors. You disobeyed Agastya himself
and reached for the skies when you were but a boy, so what use
are my words?

You want to beat the ancient sages: you've swallowed a sharp razor,
you're stretching your neck toward a fruit you cannot reach.
You think you can translate yourself to heaven, body and all.
I've had enough." And he went away in a huff.

He still intended to achieve his goal
with the help of his cow. He made his plans.
When ascetics are too determined,
Indra always gets a headache.

So Ayuta noticed this cow, near his hut.
She exhausted her energy every time she tried to stand up.
She was chewing grass and waving her tail quickly
to drive away the crows that were hurting her back.
Flies were hovering over her. When she lay down,
her dewlap fell loosely like a blanket, and her eyes were scared.
The bones of her thighs and legs stuck out because she rested on one side,
and her eyes were wet with tears. Her calf pulled hard at her empty teats
when he was hungry. There was a thick rope around her neck.

He saw her, and thought: "This looks like the cow
of that sage who was here the other day. How did she
become so sick in just a couple of days?"

He began to massage her feet, smoothing the wrinkles
on her skin and driving off the flies. He combed through her dewlap
with his fingernails, applied dust to her wounds, still oozing blood,
cleaned out the grass stuck in her mouth, and very gently
helped her walk again. He kept her tied to a pole in front of his hut.

In a thousand ways he cared for her until her weakness
and pain were healed and she grew fat and unbridled,
like friendship insincere.[14] She roamed the forest
like a poor man who turns into a bandit.

[The cow became pregnant and gave birth to calves, and Ayuta became absorbed in caring for her, to the neglect of his yogic exercises. At last, disgusted with her, he decided to drive her out of the forest.]

The calf was moaning as he tied it to the mother,
struck her hard, hung a heavy stick around her neck

14. Friendship with bad people is said to grow quickly, ending in disaster. Friendship with good people grows slowly and yields solid rewards.

to slow her walk, and with the halter in his hand,
drove her away, as one expels the smallpox goddess.[15]

Angered by all this hurt, the cow ran into the hermitage
of a sage called Vādhūla, a man awakened to reality.

Like a bush where a tiger lurks, or a lake infested by crocodiles,
or an anthill inhabited by a cobra, that place was unapproachable,
even by a god.

But the cow stampeded through it, and on her way
she trampled Vādhūla himself, the long-lived, clear-eyed yogi
sunk in meditation, who was covered up by an anthill
tall as the tallest mountain.

He stood up, the anthill crumbling around him.
Birds resting in his ears flapped their wings
and flew away, and families of snakes sleeping coiled
in his long hair were rudely awakened.

Dry grass shone on his body like a forest blaze.
That mountain of a man, his beard shaking in rage,
turned his gaze on Ayuta, who was standing nearby
after driving off the cow.

"You wretch!" he screamed. "You crazy lout!
This hermitage is off-limits to anyone
who wants to go on living. But you came in
and ruined my deep and terrible concentration,
which even Indra could not disturb
if he were to attack a hundred times.

Because you did this to me—an old, weak man,
lost in meditation, you will lose the youthful beauty
of this human form and become
a frog."

Ayuta fell at his feet, begging:
"Hold back your anger—for when you are enraged,
mountains fall, oceans dry up, the earth shatters,
and the sky collapses. I am nothing.
Burn me with your curse, but first hear me out.

I wanted to get rid of that cow, who gave me no peace,
like a snake bound with a rope. Nothing more.

15. Māri, or Māriyamma.

Your mind is a peaceful lake of deep kindness.
Don't make it play with fire."

And he told him the whole story, from the moment the cow arrived until it was driven out.

Vādhūla was appeased. He looked with sympathy
at the young boy. A Brahmin's anger is like a drop of water
at the tip of a blade of grass.

"Don't be sad," he said. "Don't grieve over what has come
through fate. The only way to rid yourself of *karma*
is to live through its results. Just keep your mind on God,
the father of the world, who saved the elephant.[16]
No one who comes to Viṣṇu will ever come to harm.

You despised family life, and that was not right.
It is the blue cloud that gives beauty to women, lithe as lightning.
It is an ocean that generates children, precious as pearls.
It is the great tree that gives shelter to hungry Brahmins
and the ladder that brings our helpless ancestors up to heaven.
Even a mild breeze from the top of the palm trees[17]
hurts people who stubbornly reject what is good.
That is why this has happened to you.

No one should think he's so big
he can make things go his way. It just won't work—
not for human beings, not even for the gods."

[Vādhūla then sent Ayuta to worship the god Narasiṃha on the bank of the Bhīmarathi River, promising him that he would find a female frog who would bear his children and in this way remove his debt to his ancestors. Ayuta made his way to the Pāṇḍuraṅga shrine at Paṇḍharpūr, worshiped Kṛṣṇa in the form of Viṭṭhala there, and found Narasiṃha to the north in a fig tree. When he saw the god, Vādhūla's curse took effect, and Ayuta felt a change slowly come over him: he began to think like a frog.]

He wanted to sleep in crab-holes at the water's edge.
He wanted food mixed with earth. He felt like croaking
and jumping, and he was suddenly afraid of snakes,
even when they were far away, and wanted to hide himself

16. Viṣṇu saved Gajendra from death when the elephant was trapped by a crocodile. See pp. 143–46.

17. Reading *tāḷḷa pai* for *rāḷḷa pai.*

in crevices. The future frog was taking over
as his human mind grew weak.

Still, though the curse was taking hold,
he found the strength to praise the Man-Lion:

"You came out of an iron pillar in that royal palace
and disemboweled the demon king with laughable ease.
After that, why did you want to be reborn?[18]
Who can understand you, Man and Beast combined?

How amazing it is that your claws, hard as diamond,
should have turned soft—when they touched Lakṣmi's breasts.
Perhaps sharpness just doesn't work
on women.

Some say it's because of anger. Others think
it's intense compassion for the whole community.
Yet others think you are distressed
that you had to become a cruel animal. This way or that,
they praise you, seeing the redness in your eyes."

The Earth[19] bears your claw-mark, a crescent
you left on her breast
when, as the Boar,[20] you lifted her high.
Lakṣmi,[21] jealous, mocks her
until you, both man and lion,
confound this mighty goddess with two marks,
one per breast."

Meanwhile, his tranquility, his intellect, his purity and power,
his proficiency in chants—all this was lost
as he became a frog. Such is fate.

All pilgrims to that shrine were filled with wonder:
"Pearls, coral, and gold have come together
in this rare form," they said, for the frog
was multicolored, a king of frogs.

18. In Viṣṇu's other *avatāra*s, including Viṭṭhala at Paṇḍharpūr.

19. Dark wife of the god.

20. A previous avatar of the god who, as Varāha, a boar with sharp tusks, raised up the goddess Earth [from the Netherworld] after she had been kidnapped by the demon Hiraṇyâkṣa.

21. The god's "high," official wife, often said to be jealous of the Earth—here because Lakṣmi observes what look like love-scars on the breast of the Earth.

Each day before sunrise, he would go to bathe quickly where the rivers meet.
Until late in the morning, he would listen as the Brahmins chanted Veda
on the sandy bank. At midday he would eat a few bites from the offerings.
From dusk to midnight he stood before the god in worship.
And when the Man-Lion lay down to rest on his serpent bed,
the frog would sit in a small hole beside his feet, fully awake,
his mind filled with Him.

People called him Hari-dāsa, "Viṣṇu's Slave."
In this way, the kingly frog
spent many years, still aware
of his former life, but hoping now
for release.

After some years, one day the lovely daughter
of the king of Kanyākubja came there
with her friends for the festival of the god.

Like the darts of Love that pierce the hearts of the lonely,
they got down from their chariot and set up camp
near the Man-Lion shrine on the bank of the Bhīmarathi.

Exhausted by the journey, they went to bathe in the river
and, naturally, stirred up the water—for even a single ray
of beauty from their warm breasts would be enough
to disturb all worlds.

Even gods worship Kāla-Bhairava,
the angry god, from a distance,
waiting for the proper moment.
But these young women simply touched him
as if he were a toy.

In the little cubicles off the porches of the monasteries,
yogis sitting in prayer were distracted
by the breeze fragrant with musk from the breasts of those girls,
and their patience shattered like the shell of the silk-cotton fruit
that explodes upon ripening.

The girls hung swings from fig trees to play on in abandon,
joking with clever double meanings and giving their hearts
to the Love God. Drunk on wine, they gave no thought
to what was wrong or right, and they were happy.

Then they caught sight of the frog, with its brightly spotted body,
coming out of the Man-Lion shrine, like an idiot indifferent to the
world.[22]

"Where did *he* come from?" they wondered. "From a golden river,[23]
or a mountain of precious stones, or the ocean of milk,
or the place where the rainbow rises?" And they cast a net
of long glances around that noble frog.

Though he wasn't a ball, or a pet parrot, or a musical instrument, or a
mirror—the sort of things women carry—still they tried to catch him,
one by one. Women are anyway unstable.

"Watch me," cried the princess. "I'll make you a bet
I can get him." And she smiled, mocking
her friends, as she made a trap out of her waistband
and quickly caught him.

She started playing with him, as one plays a while
with a bird or a ring or a doll. She was laughing,
her cheeks gleaming, and still tipsy when she threw him
without warning at an old Brahmin
who was scared of frogs. He cursed her and her friends
to become frogs—and that is how
they became wives for our frog.
They were suited to him in looks and character and feeling,
so now he swam through the endless ocean of family life,
as before he swam through water.

That tough young man, Ayuta, who had refused to marry
when Indra begged him to do so before he lost his charming youth
now spent all his time appeasing his various wives
when they were angry or upset.

And he was subject to desire, melting in love: for Vādhūla's curse
proved more effective than the Love God's burning arrows.

To the princess and the son of the sage, a boy was born.
This ended the darkness of the curse. Wisdom dawned,
like the rising moon, and they could now see the god's home.

22. Literally, like Jaḍa-bharata, the village idiot who was sent to the palace to call out the watches of the night; at each watch he sang a verse cautioning against sorrow, and by the end of the night the king, hearing his words, became a sannyāsin.

23. Reading *kanakaputḭ́ero.*

SIXTEEN

Nūtana-kavi Sūranna

Fifteenth–sixteenth century?

Little is known about this self-styled "New Poet," who claims, without elaboration, to have been born in the family of Tikkana. He must be dated between Nācana Somanātha, whom he mentions in his book, and Pĕdapāṭi Jagganna, who includes a verse by Sūranna in his *Prabandha-ratnâkaramu,* an anthology of collected verses from ca. 1600. In terms of style, Sūranna hardly stands out; what is "new" in his work is the intelligent presentation of an unusual theme, the open conflict between wealth and beauty—and also the surprisingly practical resolution he proposes to this conflict. The story takes place in the ancient temple of Bhīmesvara-Śiva at Dakṣârāma in the Konasīma delta formed by the branches of the Godāvari.[1]

BEAUTY OR WEALTH?[2]

[One day Manmatha, the handsome god of desire, came to visit Indra in heaven. All the gods' women in Indra's court were overwhelmed by the visitor's beauty.]

The king of the gods looked at the immortal women and asked, "What do you need more—looks or money?" The women tried to recover

1. See the selection from Śrīnātha's *purāṇa,* pp. 119–27, on this site.

2. Nūtana-kavi Sūranna, *Dhanâbhirāmamu* (Madras: Vavilla Ramasvamisastrulu and Sons, 1950), 1.41–42, 44–54, 62, 75, 79–80; 2.62, 65, 68–69, 84, 86, 96, 107–8, 115; 3.51, 52–55, 57–61, 75, 77, 81–85, 87–88, 92–97, 104–7.

3. Rambha and the others mentioned here are the beautiful *apsaras*-courtesans in heaven.

some composure and looked at one another. Rambha[3] said nothing. Mañjughoṣa winked at a friend. Ūrvaśi pretended not to have heard and stared up at the ceiling. Citrarekha twisted her upper cloth around her fingers, without a word. Shyly they kept stealing glimpses of Manmatha's face.

Now Manmatha himself said to Indra: "Here or there, in both heaven and earth, women care only for looks, not for money. If a man endowed with youth and beauty, who knows all about the erogenous zones and the types of women, a skillful lover—if such a man brings delight to some woman, would she be willing to sleep with anybody else, for any money?" In this way the god of desire made the point that women fall in love only with beauty, and denigrated money.

Kubera, the god of wealth, was sitting there, and he was angry. "I don't agree with what you're saying. Money is what brings affection. Handsome looks are as good as dust.

An ugly man becomes handsome,
a bad man becomes good,
a fickle one turns stable,
a coward is made into a warrior,
low-caste becomes high-caste,
an idiot achieves wisdom,
the crude turns elegant,
an illiterate lout becomes expert
in all branches of learning—
if only he has money.

A man may be master of all arts and very handsome, with a perfect body, but if he has no money, no one will let him come close. A corpse and a penniless man are the same. On the other hand, a miserable lover; a sickly man; an ugly fellow; a crude, pale, uncouth man; an ignoramus —women cannot say no to such as these, if they bring gifts of expensive clothes and gold. Status, beauty, knowledge, patience—none of these mean anything. Money is the best drug to make women fall madly in love."

When Manmatha heard Kubera arguing that the whole world rests on money, he said, eyes red with anger: "Stop this false argument. You shouldn't mix up things that are real with things that aren't; the public will not approve of it. A crazy person won't admit he's crazy, and an old man will never admit his age. It's beauty that brings money, beauty that enhances caste; with beauty, you can control the whole world. Women detest a man who is not handsome.

Money makes your best friend into an enemy.
It drives you to the point of killing,
makes you a greedy miser,
compels you to reject your own brother.
You will commit all kinds of wrong.
It destroys all paths to truth,
makes you hate your father and mother.
Lust for money brings anyone to moral ruin.
Listen to me: money is the very shape of evil."

Kubera said: "What's the use of all these arguments? Let's go to earth, to the city of Dakṣârāma.[4] You show your skill and beauty, and I'll come later and show the power of my money. Moreover, as Indra is our witness: whoever loses will be cast out of heaven." Very angry, Kubera took this as a vow, and Manmatha, no less angry, agreed: "Be it so."

[It was springtime when Manmatha arrived in Dakṣârāma, with its great temple to the god Bhīmeśvara. Among the courtesans who served the god, he saw one named Suguṇavati, "Virtuous,"] who could dance, sing, recite poetry, write down verses as they were being composed, and play the vina; she was intelligent and strikingly beautiful, skilled in all the arts. He shot his arrows at her, as a hunter spears fish. The gods watching this were wondering: "If women are beautiful, there's nothing surprising when men fall in love with them. But will *she* love *him,* and will he win?" Manmatha, certain that she was already in his power, went off to sit on the entrance porch of the temple. The courtesans finished their worship and went home, but Suguṇavati stayed there, staring at the god of love.

[Her girlfriends asked her what was wrong, and she confessed:] "After happily worshiping the god, I caught sight of a young man as handsome as Manmatha himself. He looked at me too. Why talk more? I'm stuck on him. Everybody is always falling in love with me, and I never love anyone. What can I say now, with Manmatha as my witness?"

[Her girlfriends tried to discourage her from an emotion so inappropriate to a courtesan, but she insisted:] "Who needs all these jewels and ointments and riches? Who needs those lousy customers who have no sense of what a woman wants? If you won't bring me this man that my heart desires, my life won't last. Bring him now."

[So a messenger went to call the handsome stranger, who introduced himself as Prince Manohara, Heart-Stealer. But this prince was somewhat reluctant to accept Suguṇavati's invitation:] "One simply can't go to a whore's house without sending money in advance. And at the moment I

4. Dakṣârāma was famous as a site replete with beautiful courtesans, as we know from Śrīnātha's *Bhīma-khaṇḍamu* (Madras: Ananda Press, 1901), 1.88, 112, and other sources.

have no money at all. Lovers should follow the proper etiquette. Anyway, I've come here on business. You're offering an enticing invitation, but listen to my terms. I'll come to the lady's house and make love to her and be happy, but I can't even pay anything for her expenses. What is more, I wouldn't like it if she suddenly left me for some rich man who might come along. Better not go at all than to be left under those conditions. Go tell your friend all this and see what she says."

[The messenger reported back to Suguṇavati, who was faint with lovesickness and declared:] "I have everything I need. He doesn't have to pay me anything. Even if a man as rich as Kubera, the god of wealth himself, should come, I wouldn't leave him."

[With this promise, Manmatha came to Suguṇavati, made love to her, and lived happily with her for some days. Meanwhile, Kubera came down to Dakṣârāma dressed as a Siddha, a man of yogic powers, and offered prayers to the god and a hundred flowers made of real gold. To all the dancing women he distributed precious jewels and fine clothes; he lavished bags of gold on the drummers and musicians; he showered ornaments and garments on the courtesans who were waiting nearby. Soon the whole town was captivated by his ostentatious wealth, and Suguṇavati's mother heard about him. She rushed over to the temple porch where he was staying, bowed before him, and begged him to come to her house for alms from her daughter.]

"My daughter," she said, "can sing and dance and read; she can play the vina and other instruments; she intoxicates her lovers with her finesse, her exquisite knowledge of erogenous sensation. No one is her equal in this town. She doesn't know that you are here, or she would have come herself to serve you. . . ." He smiled: "If you invite us so respectfully, it isn't right for us to say no. We'll definitely come today. However, courtesans' houses are usually packed with customers. If someone is already there, that wouldn't be good." The mother replied: "Why be so suspicious? Can any man enter my house without my consent? I'm a killer of customers. Even if it were Manmatha himself, I would drive him away."

[Satisfied by this promise, the Siddha followed her home. She seated him on a stool, washed his feet, and called all her girls.] "A son-in-law has arrived. All our needs are fulfilled. Come, all of you, bow to him." He presented them with fine jewels, expensive clothes, and perfumes. They brought him a good liquor extracted from *ippa* flowers, cooked with candied sugar and mixed with camphor of the best quality. He sipped it in his own cup, inlaid with precious jewels, but decided it was no good and threw it out—with the cup. The girls were amazed: "Not even a million gold coins could buy this cup, and he has thrown it away!" They quickly recovered it. Meanwhile, he addressed the madam: "Where is

that daughter of yours, the one you described as proficient in all the worlds' arts? Bring her, I'd like to see her."

[The madam immediately went to lecture Suguṇavati on the professional ethos of courtesans.] "You should speak honeyed words and act sweetly to attract customers. Make them feel you belong to them, and don't let them slip away. Cleverly milk them of their wealth so you can take care of your own people. That is the best way for a whore. What *isn't* right is to get stuck with one man. If you fail to follow my advice day by day, where will you get money? After a whore loses her youth, her looks, her glow, no one will give her so much as a betel nut. What else is there to say? Hurry up, check out that Siddha right away."

This line of reasoning convinced the girl, and she changed her mind. Now she was eager to see the Siddha, so she put on the jewels he had sent and said to Manmatha: "I just want to go and see that unusual Siddha my mother was telling us about. The whole city is paying respect to that good man, and now he's come to our very own home." Manmatha studied her face and said, "Sources of all sin, hard-hearted, vicious, with no redeeming features, liars, unscrupulous, deceitful in every way—whores are like that, by God. It's my own fault for coming here. They said you were the best in Dakṣârāma; all the respectable regulars sang your praises. So I didn't even look at any other whore in this town. I came straight to you. Now you're doing this to me. You know very well what you're about. Remember what you said to me—that as long as I am here, even if Kubera himself were to come and offer thousands of rupees, you wouldn't talk to him. That was your promise when you brought me here. Suddenly you want money; you want to go. What can I say about you? There's no truth in a whore. You're not really interested in good looks, in arts and skills, in culture. All you care about is money. You're no different from any other woman."

Suguṇavati said nothing in response, but her fearsome mother became angry and said: "How many women have you charmed with tricks and drugs before this? And as if that weren't enough, now you've made this one crazy for you. You've eaten us out of house and home. You give nothing. Stop your crooked ways and leave, fast. Your good looks, your youth, your winning ways—who needs them? Are they precious jewels or gold or clothes? You're just pretending, but it won't work with me. Cut it out. Whoever heard of a whore paying her customer? You don't seem to know anything. What have you given this woman? Did you bring her any jewels, or help her out in any way? You seem impervious even to insult. We can't get even a single rupee out of you. Enough is enough. Get out. A customer shouldn't hang around." With these harsh words she hurt his feelings and pried Suguṇavati away from him. Ashamed, Manmatha left the house: "I almost never go to Indra's court. Why did I have to go that

day and then, for no good reason, why did I have to get involved in that argument with Kubera? Why did I make that wager? Now there's no way for me to return to heaven. The only way for me is to worship Śiva with all my heart in the hope of winning happiness in *his* world."

[Manmatha went to the temple in Dakṣârāma and prayed to the god, who appeared before him together with Kubera, in the form of the Siddha, in his retinue. The god said to Kubera:]

"You are the lord of wealth, and Manmatha excels in beauty. Both of you, listen to me carefully, if you wish to understand truly the way of the world. Without beauty, no one pays you any attention. And if you have no money, you're in trouble. You need both—looks *and* money. This is true for gods as it is true for human beings. There is no need for conflict between you. Go back to the way you were before." God made peace between them, gave them gifts, and disappeared into the triple *liṅga*.[5] The gods all returned to their homes, and the women of Dakṣârāma lived as happily as before, endowed with *both* beauty and wealth.

5. Perhaps the three famous *liṅgas* that define premodern Andhra: Dakṣârāma, Śrīśailam, and Kāḷahasti.

SEVENTEEN

Piṅgaḷi Sūranna

Second half of the sixteenth century?

Although the later tradition associates this poet with Kṛṣṇadevarāya's group of eight great poets, there is good reason to date him considerably later in the sixteenth century, or even the early seventeenth century, and to locate him far from the Vijayanagara capital. Sūranna lived in Nandyāla in Rāyalasīma. He dedicated his *Kaḷāpūrṇodayamu* to the local ruler, Nandyāla Kṛṣṇamarāju, a member of a collateral branch of the Aravīḍu family that produced the final imperial dynasty at Vijayanagara. Another patron, Ākuvīṭi Pĕda Veṅkaṭâdri, sponsored his *Rāghava-pāṇḍavīyamu,* a tour de force that tells, simultaneously, the stories of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* (though this work is actually dedicated to the god Pampa Virūpâkṣa-deva at Vijayanagara). His third surviving *kāvya, Prabhāvatī-pradyumnamu,* is offered to his father, Amaranârya.

What is clear from all Sūranna's surviving works is his intense interest in the poetic and creative powers of language. The story he tells in his *Kaḷāpūrṇodayamu,* for example, shows us a linguistic utterance materializing itself in consciousness and in the world. The hero of the tale, Kaḷā-pūrṇa ("Moon/Fullness of Art"), first exists as a name in a story invented by the god Brahmā to pacify his wife Sarasvati, but this purely narrative and verbal existence soon becomes entirely real in a living human being with a complex, emotionally vital biography. The narrative is far too complicated to be summarized here: the section we have translated is a small, embedded subtext, one of many subsumed by the wider narrative frame. In a sense, Sūranna is the true inheritor of the linguistic metaphysics known from Sanskrit sources, such as Bhartṛhari, but in another sense, he belongs to a period of renewed interest in language—including grammar, poetics, metrics, and linguistic philosophy—that seems to have swept through the Deccan in the late 16th

and early 17th century.[1] What he offers us is a narrativized exposition of deep intuitions about the nature and dynamics of language, especially in its creative and transformative aspects.

In this lies the true originality of this poet, who has been extravagantly praised in the twentieth century for a rather irrelevant technical reason—the fact that he produced a work, the *Kaḷāpūrṇodayamu,* that has no Sanskrit original behind it. This critical viewpoint reflects a basic misunderstanding of the relation between Sanskrit texts and their Telugu retellings. Moreover, Sūranna's sources, largely from the *kathā* tradition, are in any case apparent. What is unique is the penetrating insight into the inner workings of language within consciousness exemplified, with an astonishing wealth of invention, in the tale he unfolds. The interest in linguistic themes is also naturally carried over into the *dvyarthi-kāvya, Rāghava-pāṇḍavīyamu,* with its double register of stories embodied in the same text and the same sounds.

BEAUTY UNADORNED[2]

[Maṇikandhara, a *gandharva* musician, narrates the following tale to his beloved Kalabhāṣiṇi:]

Once I went to the throne of the goddess of arts[3] in order to prove myself in poetry. There, in one of the halls, I saw a Brahmin master engrossed in teaching Veda: first he would give the proper tone, to ensure precision in word and syllable; then he would guide the pupils in the tonal accents by dramatic movements of his eyebrows. He also gave them mnemonic devices to help them to distinguish one section from another. If one of them was not concentrating and uttered a wrong note, the teacher would pinch his cheeks in punishment. When I approached him, he said: "Come. Who are you? You shine with an internal brightness." And he asked me about my family and my name. Then he dismissed his class—since the arrival of a guest was reason for a holiday—and offered me hospitality.

Soon a student arrived, wearing a belt of *muñja* grass and a garment yellow with turmeric, draped around his delicate body. His face was alive with intelligence and inner fire. He had an antelope skin, a sacred thread, a brilliant forehead dot and the marks of a servant of Viṣṇu: a ring, a staff, and a thin tuft of hair. He was carrying a book and seemed

1. See discussion of Appakavi on pp. 48–50.

2. Piṅgaḷi Sūranna, *Kaḷāpūrṇodayamu* (Hyderabad: Andra Pradesh Sahitya Akademi, 1980), 4.39, 41–78, 82–86, 89–108, 110–32, 136–44.

3. The Śāradā-pīṭha in Kashmir, supposedly established by the great philosopher Śaṅkara.

rather agitated. The teacher looked at him and said, "Why are you so late?" He answered: "There's a good reason. You must not have heard. I'll tell you. I went at your command to the flower garden where Śālīna was sitting in a pergola while his wife, Sugātri, was rubbing his feet, held in her lap. They were conversing happily. He saw me and smiled: 'Has your teacher sent you for the book? I have kept it here for you.' He pointed to a branch above his head. 'You can take it; just sit with us for a while.' And he showed me a seat in the shade of a young mango tree. Then he put his hands on his wife's shoulders and said to her, 'Have you been drinking the juice of lasting life, my dear, or have you found some magical potions? You become more beautiful and youthful day by day. They say women age faster than men, so what is it that constantly enhances your vitality?' She smiled a little and said, 'I don't really know. Probably it's because you are so much in love that you always see in me such youth and beauty.' Śālīna replied, 'No, I'm not imagining things. If you don't know, I'll tell you. *I* am the reason.' He bent her head close to his mouth and whispered something, with a smile, in her ear. She made a face, surprised. Looking into his eyes, she said, 'When I asked that goddess earlier for something, she said yes. How is she going to keep her word? Listen, I'll tell you what I asked for.' And she brought her lips close to his ear and whispered something. Suddenly, Śālīna was furious. He rushed off in a huff, with his wife racing after him, and jumped into the lake deep as a hundred palm trees. She cried, 'What is there for me to do except to follow his footsteps? I won't leave him even if he has left me!' And she took a running jump into the lake, at the very same spot. You probably didn't hear of this because the place is far from here. All the villagers have been dredging the lake with nets, with no success. They've only now given up. I went back to get the book from the place Śālīna had shown me."

The teacher was overcome with grief and amazement. "Alas," he said, "that happy couple has suffered an undeserved fate. That lake is famous for its depth. No one who falls into it can survive. Who can escape their *karma*?" I then asked him, in his sadness, "Who are these two people, Sugātri and Śālīna? You have praised them as noble; tell me their story." He replied, "This book tells their story. It's good luck to hear it—especially now that we no longer have the good fortune to be able to see them." He picked up the book that his student had brought, touched it to his head and to his eyes, then gave it back to the boy and asked him to read it. Here is what he read:

Once there was a Brahmin girl called Sugātri, daughter of a priest who served the goddess of learning, established on her throne in the middle

of the Kashmir land. Her husband, Śālīna,[4] lived with his in-laws. Sugātri's girlfriends decorated her sumptuously on her nuptial night and sent her to her husband, while they waited outside. But he was so startled by all her jewels that he hesitated to touch her. She waited for some time and left.

Her girlfriends told her mother. They wondered: "This is unheard of on this earth. What could be the reason? What a fun young fellow you've got! Anyway, tonight is lost; tomorrow he'll show us his wild ways." They laughed, and the mother said: "Quiet, you silly girls! He'll hear you. Shy people sometimes give up everything if they suspect they are being ridiculed."

So she sent her daughter to the son-in-law for two or three more days. But he treated her in exactly the same way as the first night. The young bride went and came for nothing. Her girlfriends, with the mother's permission, said to her: "It doesn't look like you're acting as husband and wife. Both of you are clearly experts. What can we say?

If the man knows what to do, it's right for the woman
to be shy. If, however, the man is a moron,
and the woman is also timid, what's the point
of being married?

Listen. You're no longer a little girl. You can't just sit around waiting, just because he doesn't talk to you. Men are lucky, but a woman cannot keep her pride too long. You should serve him on your own initiative; eventually, his heart will melt. You shouldn't have come back just because he hasn't called you lovingly right away. Offer him betel nut with camphor, and a folded leaf.[5] You must be a fool. It just isn't right that you waste your youth, so ripe for pleasure, on an empty bed. Women need the joys of a husband when they're young; what good are they when youth is gone?"

She listened and said, a bit coy, "You're killing me with all these words. I can't bear to hear them." But that night she tried out their advice—with no results. She thought: "If I do anything more, he'll probably leave me for good. It's no use. At least I have a living husband, and a marriage thread." She went on decorating herself fully, each day, to bring good luck to her husband,[6] and she begged her mother not to humiliate him. The mother held her tongue for many days, waiting patiently. One day she said, "I've never seen such a good-for-nothing. If I say anything against him, you defend him. Are you about to give birth to a male child who could take care of my property? We've seen his ways. It's like giving

4. The names of this couple are significant. Sugātri = "Pretty Body"; Śālīna = "Shy."
5. The offering of betel is a frequent euphemism for sexual contact.
6. A wife adorns herself as an auspicious guarantee of her husband's longevity.

a loan with a barren cow for collateral. But if I throw him out, you will be distressed. At least we could send him to take care of the flower garden." So she called him respectfully and put him to work, taking care to instruct him and to discipline him in the necessary skills.

Śālīna was happy because this work was a service to the goddess Śārada, so he performed it with concentration. He tended the lovely flowers, heavy with honey, pollen, and masses of drunken bees. He watered at the proper times, making channels for every plant; he turned over the earth and carried baskets of manure in his own hands without any hesitation; he grafted plants together, gently bending their tender branches; he prepared seedbeds and planted grafts—all with mounting excitement. He would skillfully cut the flowers and weave them into garlands and bouquets in many inventive ways, to be offered to the goddess of arts.

Now Sugātri, out of a sense of duty as a wedded wife, and unable to watch from afar the hard work her husband was doing at her mother's behest, wanted to go there and help him—but she was too shy to do so. One day when Śālīna had gone off to the garden, lightning streaked through the skies, striking everywhere; there was thunder, and a terrifying downpour of rain. From the moment the clouds appeared and the first drops smashed into the earth, Sugātri was afraid her husband would be soaked. She addressed him in her mind: "How will you survive this torrential rain, beloved husband? How did you get stuck with this miserable work in the garden?" She scanned the skies over and over and prayed to her family goddess, Sarasvati: "O Śārada, our compassionate mother, please watch over my husband. I have no support except for you. If I have done anything good in this body, or in some previous bodies—some vow, or act of meditation, or donation—may its merit save my husband from the calamity of this rain. Let me bear the effects of whatever evil he has done that has brought this upon him."

Not content with that, and indifferent to the heavy rain, she left the house in desperation, without her mother's knowledge. Because of her loyalty to her husband, the rain did not affect her; the flooding water gave way before her, opening a dry path. She reached the garden where her husband was and watched him from a distance. She saw that he was safe, untroubled by the winds or rain, protected by the goddess in response to her prayer. "Mother Sarasvati, you have shown your concern for us," she thought, overjoyed. She returned home, and no-one knew that she had gone there. In her shyness, she went on just as before. People were amazed that the flower garden was undamaged by the storm.

Shy Sugātri patiently suffered as her husband toiled. Finally she conquered her bashfulness and, her heart full of love for her husband, paying no more heed to her mother's words, she went, dressed as usual, to the garden. At first he would not let her work with him, but she was insistent:

she put her jewels away in a corner and tied her sari around her waist. She started digging with a shovel, her breasts swaying up and down, her full buttocks shaking as she walked briskly back and forth. She fed water to the plants through muddy channels, and mud splashed onto her smooth cheeks. She carried bundles that burdened her tiny waist and made it tremble. Sweating a little, her hair dancing, graceful, she performed each task before he could. And as she worked, the God of Desire, noticing her quivering buttocks and breasts and hair, let loose his arrows at her husband, as if in target practice.

Śālīna could not fend off those arrows. "You crazy woman," he said, "you just won't stop, even if I ask you. You're so far removed from gardening." With the edge of his upper cloth, he wiped the beads of sweat from her cheeks. But the sweat kept pouring out, through Desire's tricky power. Looking at her glistening cheeks, he said, "You couldn't bear to watch me toil, and now you've exhausted yourself with this work." Hungrily he embraced her neck, and hugged her. Then he carried her to a soft bed of flowers and made love to her with joyful passion.

Afterward, he held her even tighter, his desire still growing. She said, "All this is quite new. Shouldn't we go home?" Gently she made him let go. Putting on the jewels she had hidden, she walked toward home, her heart full of her husband's ways. After that lovemaking, she was pleasantly tired, like a fresh flower exposed to the springtime sun. Loved by her husband, Sugātri reached home. Her girlfriends could tell at a glance that her wish had been fulfilled; they teased her, and her mother was also pleased. That night her girlfriends eagerly adorned her even more than normally and sent her to her husband in the bedroom.

Her tremulous waist, wearied by effort; her slightly soiled, thin sari slipping over her buttocks; the necklace rippling over her swinging breasts, tightly tied in the top of her sari; the dot of turmeric and musk on her forehead, smudged by sweat; her huge bun of hair, trembling at every move—all these combined in a single image as she ran ahead of him to perform the various tasks in the garden, and that image stuck in his mind. So now, at night, he did not even look at her splendid ointments, ornaments, and dress. As usual, he sat distracted. His wife waited for quite some time, wondering sadly what she had done wrong. She thought of leaving, but then she thought: "If I go, who is there for me? I'll wait here. What will be will be." She stayed by the door. After a long time, she gathered herself up and approached him. "You must be very tired after all that work. Shall I go? Would you like to sleep?" she whispered, wafting fragrance, in his ear.

Still distracted, he asked: "What do you want from me?" She answered with a languorous lilt in her voice, "What do women usually want from a husband?" Then, patiently: "My lord, forget all the rest. I'm happy that

you took enough interest to ask. How can I blame you? It's dawn already, and you haven't even asked me to rub your feet, or to come near you. You didn't even open your eyes enough to look at me with a little love. Today in the garden, my good fortune must have ripened fully. It's only after finding your love in that way that I have spoken to you so openly. I know this is not the way a good wife should talk."

In her heart, she was feeling the pain of increasing desire. She thought a little and said, "Even a rock is better than your heart. You'll never do anything by yourself." She gently touched his foot. Pressing it, she sat on the edge of the bed and placed it on her thighs, soft as golden silk. Then she pressed it against her breasts, brought it near her eyes, and touched it tightly to her cheek in evidence of her love. He remained lost in thought. She wondered what was going on. In agitation, she said: "Perhaps you're in love with some other woman and can't take your mind off her. So bring her here. Or, if she'll listen to me, send me and I will bring her. I will serve her just as I serve you, as a slave. Believe me. Why all these knots? It's enough if you are fulfilled. You can sell me off if you want. Tell me what's worrying you."

All the while she was massaging his foot. He had no idea at all what was happening. He was obsessed with that first vision of her beauty, the disheveled form, the quick movements as she was working, the gentleness and comfort of her affection, her ways of making love. So the night passed, as she tirelessly pressed his feet in true devotion, without another word.

The next day she went, like the day before, to work in the garden. Once again she found her husband's love, and she realized: "He cares only for this sort of beauty, but not for ornaments." From then on she went there every day, worked in the garden, and made her husband happy with love-making as he pleased.

Eventually her mother came to know about all this. She spoke in private to her daughter: "My dear, your were born with the blessings of the goddess of arts. The goddess came to me in a dream and promised that our whole family would become pure through your acts—as if she knew you very well. My husband, your father, has gone away to another land. I am counting on your children to take care of me in my old age; that's why I keep waiting for you to have sons. But one thing is bothering me. Listen to me. People say that making love at the wrong time produces sons without good qualities. At the beginning, for some strange reason, he didn't want you, and I spoke to him in anger. But we have our old servants to work in the garden, don't we? Why should your husband work there? Why should you? You are young in age, but old in wisdom. You know what's right and what's wrong."

Sugātri broke into a gentle smile. "Whatever my husband likes is right,

and what he doesn't like is wrong. That's my natural way of thinking. I won't change it. To me, the husband is God, text, and teacher. I will follow his commands, without considering any other rights or wrongs. I'm not refraining from anything just because it is forbidden, nor doing anything just because it is prescribed. I will do what he wants, without any hesitation, and reject whatever he rejects."

When she said this, the goddess of arts herself appeared, full of praise for her loyalty to her husband. She held her with a motherly embrace, looked at the mother, and said: "Don't try to fix this fine woman's ways. With her strong love, she has washed away not only her own sins but also those of both families. From now on, her story will be my very favorite. I myself will publicize it in the world."

The Brahmin boy finished reading and tied up the book.[7] The teacher looked at me and said, "It's a good story. The goddess of arts must have immeasurable love for Sugātri and Śālīna. She came to me in my dream and told me to read this book every morning. That same night she also gave this book to all the literate people in the town. Everyone has been talking about this in amazement. Just yesterday I myself went to that garden to see the happy couple. They received me with honor—but I forgot the book there. Today, early in the morning, I wanted to read it and remembered. I sent this boy to bring it, and now this bad news has come." I left him there, grieving for this couple in many ways.

[The narrator, Maṇikandhara, will shortly learn what the young couple had whispered to one another. Śālīna informed his wife that he had asked the goddess to stop her from getting pregnant, in order to keep her young forever. Sugātri, on the other hand, had asked that her husband should have a son through their lovemaking. These contradictory boons, *both* granted by the goddess, drove the two lovers to their suicidal jump. Both, however, survive, and both boons come true when Sugātri becomes a man, Śālīna becomes a woman, and in this transformed state they mate and produce a son—Kaḷāpūrṇa, the hero of this work.]

7. The book is obviously in manuscript form, with covers on either end bound with string.

EIGHTEEN

Appakavi

Mid–seventeenth century

Perhaps the most influential grammarian in Telugu, Kākunūri Appakavi tells us in extraordinary detail, in the introduction to his *Appakavīyamu,* how he came to compose his book in 1656. He was living in the village of Kāmĕpalli in Palnāḍu when, one night, Viṣṇu appeared in his dream and prepared him for the arrival the next morning of a Brahmin from Mataṅga Hill, who would be carrying a written copy of the grammatical *sūtras* attributed to Nannaya and known as *Āndhra-śabda-cintāmaṇi.* Like other important books, this grammar is said to have been lost and miraculously recovered. Appakavi tells us that he made his own copy of the Brahmin's text; Appakavi's work then takes the form of a commentary on the original *sūtras.* Although some of the *sūtra* material may go back as far as Nannaya, the story seems to preserve the memory of a moment of creative synthesis in Telugu linguistics and poetics, in the mid–seventeenth century, retrospectively linked with an imagined original text that can be attributed to the first poet. Moreover, despite the self-description of the *Appakavīyamu* as a commentary, it is really a highly original book that uses the *sūtras* as little more than a hook on which to hang new ideas.

Unfortunately, only two chapters of Appakavi's text have survived: the sections on phonology and metrics. The latter subject clearly engaged the attention of Andhra poets and scholars in this period and earlier,[1] as dozens of surviving metrical treatises can attest. This fascination with metrical rules is part of a wider and more fundamental interest in the potent properties of

1. The earliest we have is *Kavi-janâśrayamu* by Malliya Recana (perhaps eleventh century), though attributed to Bhīmakavi. Appakavi cites this work (3.260) and also finds it necessary to defend its author from "mistakes" that he classes as later interpolations—since, by definition, the first grammar of metrics should have no faults.

sound and syllables. Correctly used, in a metrical sense, poetic syllables have the power to change, and to create, reality—to kill a person, or to bring him or her back to life. The true poet—*vaśya-vākku*—is capable of controlling and using this inherent energy; by contrast, someone who uses language unawares, without this dimension of control, could unwittingly cause harm to himself, to others, or to the world. For language is autonomous in its power, a living and active reality. Appakavi's grammar, like earlier metrical works, is rooted in this conception. He aims to teach the aspiring poet how to use the syllables properly and how to achieve the fruitful inner relation to language that comes into play in poetic speech. Thus Appakavi tells us which deity presides over which syllable, which of the natural elements is associated with a given sound (*agni-bīja, vāyu-bija,* etc.)—and all this, in contrast to the use of *mantras,* for example, in relation to the semantic expressivity of poetic language.

Although other works attributed to Appakavi have been lost, we can see from the surviving portions of the *Appakavīyamu* that he had a wide-ranging erudition in Vedic sciences, astrology, *āgamas,* poetics, linguistics, and the systems of philosophy. Both his father and his grandfather were great scholars; his father, Vĕṅganna, was known as *māraṭa brahma,* "a second Creator." The family, apparently independently wealthy, stemmed from Tĕlaṅgāṇa (Kakunūri in present-day Mahbubnagar District). Unlike other Telugu authors, Appakavi has no patron—except for the god himself, who appeared in his dream.

ON POETRY AND GRAMMAR[2]

[One evening in the Śāka year 1578,[3] in the village of Kāmĕpalli, Appakavi, who had declared his intention to compose a book, worshiped Kṛṣṇa, conversed with scholars about the *purāṇas,* and then went to sleep. That night Viṣṇu appeared to him in his dream. The dreamer recognized the god by the weapons and other attributes he held in his hands, and bowed to him (in the dream). Viṣṇu said:]

"I am delighted at your awakening.
Let me introduce my two wives, Wealth and Earth,
and myself—the god with lotus eyes.
I have come to you, good Brahmin, in affection,
to bring you certain fortune.

2. Appakavi, *Appakavīyamu, pīṭhika* (Madras: Vavilla Ramasvamisastrulu and Sons, 1966), 40–68, 87, 93–95.

3. 1656 A.D.

Make Nannaya's book into Telugu, with my help,
to the poets' astonishment and praise.

Don't ask me how you are to turn into Telugu
a book you've never heard or seen. I'll tell you
all about that book, and how it will come to you.

Nannaya Bhaṭṭa first composed the grammar called
Āndhra-śabda-cintāmaṇi, the "Magic Jewel of Telugu Words."
Then, following those rules, he wrote three books
from the *Mahābhārata,* the first poem in the language.

While he was busy with the *Bhārata,* Nannaya suppressed his rival Bhīmana's book, *Rāghava-Pāṇḍavīya.* Nannaya's grammar was also a potential rival to Bhīmana's treatise on meter, so the jealous Bhīmana stole Nannaya's book and destroyed it.

Later a mighty poet in Dakṣavāṭi made a rule:
Telugu poets must never use a single word unless it is attested
in the *Bhārata* of Nannaya, the lawmaker of language,
since no rules of grammar survived.

From that time on, great poets of the past, Tikkana and the rest,
composed their works following the words and ways of Nannaya,
in his three volumes.

But Sāraṅgadhara, the son of King Rājarājanarendra, had memorized this
Telugu grammar of Nannaya's in his childhood, even as Nannaya was
composing it. No one else ever knew it.

Sāraṅgadhara's feet and arms were amputated
by the order of his senseless father, but they grew back
with the help of the Siddha Matsyendra.[4] Then Sāraṅgadhara
himself joined the ranks of the Siddhas.

That worthy man gave the book of grammar
to Bālasarasvati, near Mataṅga Hill, in the last Kilaka year.[5]
The latter wrote a Telugu gloss on it.

4. Rājarājanarendra's wife became enamored of Sāraṅgadhara and tried to seduce him. When he rejected her advances, she slandered him to his father, who ordered his arms and legs cut off. The great Siddha Matsyendranātha found him lying in this state in the forest and healed him. For a discussion of this story, see Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance, Court and State in Nāyaka Period Tamilnadu* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 125–43.

5. One of the year names in the sixty-year cycle. Mataṅga Hill is located at Vijayanagara; the story thus ties itself to the great kingdom.

That is how it happened that Bhīmakavi, with evil intent,
threw Nannaya's grammar into the Godāvarī River,
and that later King Rājarājanarendra's son saved it
for the world.

That book, with eighty-two *ārya* verses and five chapters,
will be delivered at your door by a Brahmin
from Mataṅga Hill.

The lawmaker of language[6] composed that Sanskrit grammar
with the help of Nārāyanabhaṭṭa.[7] *I* will assist you
in making it Telugu.

In the language of the gods, one can pack dense meaning
into *sūtras* of minimal syllables. If you do not elaborate
in Telugu, will anyone understand?

Nannaya composed the rules of word-making
in the impenetrable coconut mode.[8]
Mere Telugu speakers won't find their way through them.
You must write them in a style soft as grapes.

Also, since the lawmaker of language was composing in Sanskrit,
where no Telugu can be used, he gave the rules alone
without even one example. That's why some rules
were unintelligible.

Can anyone—even the Creator, even his lovely wife,
the Goddess of Words—count the words generated
out of a single *sūtra?* Still, you can show a few.

It is impossible to make into Telugu any works of the poets and sages—
the *purāṇas, itihāsas,* or *kāvyas*—from the past, from the present,
or yet to be composed, without following these rules of grammar.
If you translate them ably into Telugu, you will have the merit
of creating all those books.

Tātana[9] and Nūtna-Daṇḍi[10] covered a little
of Telugu grammar. Good scholars though they were,
their works are not comparable to this.

6. Nannaya.
7. See the selection from Nannaya on pp. 56 and 60.
8. That is, one has to chop his way into the kernel and its milk.
9. Vĕllāṅki Tātam Bhaṭṭu, the author of a work on prosody titled *Sulakṣaṇa-sāramu.*
10. Ketana, the author of *Āndhra-bhāṣā-bhūṣaṇamu.*

Those poets who agonize over words
lest they be incorrect will be guided by this book
to good paths through the wilderness
of Telugu language.

Because your book will be helpful to poets,
you will store up merit and true fame that will lead you
to heaven. What could be more wonderful
than making it into Telugu?

Viṣṇu in Kāmĕpalle is your own god.
Dedicate the book to him. We ask nothing more
from you than this."

With this command, he went away,
and I woke up. I looked everywhere, and my heart
was flooded. I was ecstatic, since I knew
that a dream in the early morning
is never untrue. At that very moment,
a Brahmin came from Mataṅga Hill
with a bundle of books in his arms.

I welcomed him as a guest and fed him.
As we were talking, he quoted the phrase
"*Viśva-śreyaḥ kāvyam*"—"Poetry is for the good
of the world." "Where is that from?" I asked,
and he replied: "Don't you know that it's the first
verse of Nannaya's book? Here is the text,
with all eighty-two verses."[11] I was amazed,

called everybody around, and told them my dream. Hearing it, all were delighted. Among them were some relatives on my mother's side, lumi-

11. Note that Mataṅga Hill is apparently the site where an unnamed Yogi—Sāraṅgadhara?—gave Yĕlakūci Bālasarasvati a surviving version of Nannaya's grammar, according to *Bālasarasvatīyamu* 1.3–4. This Telugu gloss on *Āndhra-śabda-cintāmaṇi,* ed. Vajjhala Cina Sitaramasvami Sastri (Madras: Vavilla Ramasvamisastrulu and Sons, 1963) thus appears to support, in essence, Appakavi's story of the loss and recovery of this text. Appakavi himself refers to the *Bālasarasvatīyamu* (verse 50, above); in verse 96 he states that it was the *ādhāramu,* that is, the basis, for his own commentary. This implies that the text the Brahmin from Mataṅga Hill brought to Appakavi *included* Bālasarasvati's commentary. More likely, Appakavi either embellished the laconic statement in *Bālasarasvatīyamu* or offered a fuller version of an existing story about the lost grammar. A later retelling of this story in the Sanskrit *Ahobalapaṇḍitīya* (*Kavi-śiro-bhūṣaṇa*)—a Sanskrit commentary on the *Āndhra-śabda-cintāmaṇi*—notes the discrepancies in the text of the *sūtras* as found in Appakavi and Bālasarasvati; here, too, Appakavi receives the grammar from a Brahmin who comes from Mataṅga Hill.

naries in the family, authors themselves, versed in the arts of worldly success. They said to me:

"Because you saw God, you will attain final freedom.
Because the goddess Wealth was with him,
you'll be rich. Because Earth came too, you will have lands.
The conch and wheel point toward victory.
Because he told you to write the book,
learning will be yours.

Viṣṇu himself said you will be blessed. Why even wonder
if it was a good dream? The book God asked you to write
has already turned up with this Brahmin. This is proof
enough for us."

So I eagerly made a copy of the book Nannaya composed,
sent the Brahmin off to Benares, and, with the permission
of my elders and senior scholars, began to write.
I was thinking, my heart alive with happiness:

"This Telugu grammar lay hidden all these years,
unavailable to great poets like Tikkana and others,
and hence was never made into Telugu.
This is my great good fortune, the result of my discipline
in many previous births.

Moreover, that God who came to me last night in a dream
and told me to make this book
will be there for me whenever there is a word
I don't know. There is no reason to hesitate
any more."

ON GOOD BOOKS[12]

Just as many mountains can be reflected
in one small mirror, all the marks of good poetry
can easily be seen in my book.

This book is as basic to Telugu
as the Science of Language is for Sanskrit.
If you study my book before writing poetry,
your work will become famous. Otherwise,
it's no use.

12. Appakavi, *Appakavīyamu* (Madras: Vavilla Ramasvamisastrulu and Sons, 1966), 1.8–11, 14–19, 21, 23–26, 42–50, 53, 55–58.

Wise men say that one should carefully look
for good marks when you buy gems,
receive poetry, acquire horses, or get a woman.

Only one who knows the marks
can turn a king of kings into a beggar,
or make a beggar into a banker.

Of all good things, poetry is best.
Anyone who has it lives in heaven
for endless eons.

A son, a water tank, a poem, an endowment,
a temple, a grove, and a Brahmin settlement—
these are the seven modes of life after death.

One who creates even one of them,
however badly he has lived,
will release 101 generations from hell
and lead them to freedom.

Six of the seven—temples, groves, and others—
fall into ruin in the course of time.
Poetry is the exception. That's why King Bhoja
wrote a poem.

And if you think about it, Brahmin villages and the like
just stand still where you put them.
Only if you describe them in a book
can they move through the world.
Poetry enhances all.

Just as drainage water from the city
flows into the Godāvarī River and becomes pure,
even a person who has lived a bad life
is purified by entering
a poem.

For a poet, poetry always offers good advice,
cleanses of evil, brings money, luck, and fame,
and makes the gods visible.

Millions of good people were born, lived, and died
in all four eons, in all seven worlds.
We've never heard of even one of them
except for those sung by poets
in books ancient and new.

Vālmīki tells us in the Rāma story
that monkeys built a bridge over the ocean
to Laṅka. But for his poem, people would think
this bridge was just another long island.

The Yajur Veda says that a Brahmin who is a poet
is pure, and his poem is as pure as milk
from a tawny cow.

A poem made by a Śūdra, however rich
in similes and texture, is not to be received.
Even a well-cooked rice pudding
cannot be offered to the gods, if it is touched
by a crow.

Just as a gem enhances a bracelet, and the bracelet
enhances the gem, so a poet and his patron
make each other famous.

It was Vālmīki who made Rāma known,
as Vyāsa did the Pāṇḍavas,
and Kālidāsa did for Bhoja—
by making their lives into story.

Earlier, in this world, sages made poetry.
That's why it is said, *nânṛṣiḥ kurute kāvyam,*
"Only one who has a vision can make a poem."
But in the present age, good poets are our sages.

Who is a real poet?
A Brahmin of peaceful mind, faithful to his teacher,
pure, imaginative,
skilled in the ways of great poets of the past,
with a gentle heart.

There are seven kinds of poets: the selective, the wordsmith,
the mellifluous, the minimalist, the craftsman, the ornate,
and the delicately lucid.

The selective poet examines every letter, meaning, quality, and
defect.
The wordsmith constantly seeks out words that sound alike.
The mellifluous fills his poem with sweetness and softness.
The minimalist packs elaborate meanings into a few syllables.
The craftsman alliterates anywhere.
The ornate poet works with tropes and figures.
The delicately lucid evokes feeling with sparse but fluid touches.

Someone who uses filler words,
who substitutes short syllables for long,
who can't fit his phrases around the metrical breaks
and chooses meaningless sounds—
can you call him a poet?

Like a fly that settles on an ulcer and ignores the healthy limbs,
a bad poet, when he reads others' works, is drawn only
to the lapses and overlooks what is good.
Like the goose that can separate milk from water,
a good poet gravitates to the best.

A bad poet dismisses what he fails to understand
as wrong and scorns it. A good poet stops
and thinks until he understands. If still it isn't clear,
he consults the elders.

The wise say that poetry is the only form of knowledge.
Is there any doubt? Poetry is the ultimate
learning. To know it is to know the world.

A king is honored in his own kingdom. If he crosses the border,
he's not worth a cowry shell. A scholar, though, is respected
everywhere. A poet is better still. As the saying goes,
"If you have poetry, who needs a kingdom?" This is true.
That's why poets write.

It's a joy when a woman or a poem
comes naturally to you.
If you force them, they bring you grief.

All the labor you invest in learning metrics and poetics
is a waste—if you are not driven to create
well-wrought poems in pleasing words.

The learning of a man with no ability to compose
never comes to life, like the shape of things at night
in a house without lamps.

NINETEEN

Kṣetrayya

Seventeenth century

This great master of the *padam* form belongs primarily to the Tamil country under the so-called Nāyaka kings. Nothing solid is known about him. His signature line usually refers to his god as Muvvagopāla—perhaps "Kṛṣṇa from the village of Muvva" (often identified with a village near Kūcipūḍi in Kṛṣṇa District, though there are also other Muvvas further south, in North Arcot and in Cittūr near Kārveṭinagaram). But the name could also mean something like "Gopāla of the jingling bells" and have nothing to do with any village.

One of Kṣetrayya's *padams* refers to Vijayarāgahva Nāyaka of Tañjāvūr,Tirumala Nāyaka of Madurai, and the Golconda Padshah; this locates him clearly in the mid–seventeenth century. Unlike Annamayya, he is not firmly associated with any single shrine but seems to have wandered through south India—hence, by popular etymology, his name (from *kṣetra,* "temple site"; in Sanskritized form, he is Kṣetrajña). It is more to the point, however, to imagine him in the courtesans' quarters of the temple towns; he sings of courtesans and their lovers, usually in a female voice, and his compositions were probably meant for performance by courtesans themselves. In the dance tradition, these songs were sung orally by the male teacher (*naṭṭuvaṉār*) while the courtesan danced—a male voice singing in an adopted female persona a song composed by a male poet for a woman. Here the courtesan's lover or patron is addressed as the god Muvvagopāla, and the intimacy of feeling and knowledge between god and devotee is explicitly sexual in text and texture. Only an apologetic, post-Victorian sensibility has managed to mask the eroticism and tone in modern contexts of performance by offering spiritual or allegorical readings of these utterly uninhibited songs.[1]

1. For a wider selection of Kṣetrayya padams, see A. K. Ramanujan, Velcheru Narayana Rao, and David Shulman, *When God Is a Customer: Telugu Courtesan Songs by Kṣetrayya and Others* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

COURTESAN SONGS[2]

A Woman Speaks to Her Lover

It's true, I have my period,
but don't let that stop you.
No rules apply
to another man's wife.

I beg you to come close,
but you always have second thoughts.
All those codes were written
by men who don't know how to love.
When I come at you, wanting you,
why do you back off?
You don't have to touch my whole body.
Just bend over and kiss.

No rules apply.

What if I take off my sari
and crush your chest with my breasts?
I'll be careful, except with my lips.
Here is some betel: take it
with your teeth. No one's here.
I'm watching.

No rules apply.

You don't seem to know yourself.
Why follow these false taboos?
Haven't you heard that women like it now?
It's not like every day.
You'll never forget
today's joy.

No rules apply.

A Courtesan to the Madam

Never mind if he doesn't pay.
Let him come.

When he was rich,
he gave me whatever I dreamed of.
Some days you have money,

2. Kṣetrayya, *Padamulu,* ed. Kandadai Appan Krishnamacaryulu (Madras: Vavilla Ramasvamisastrulu and Sons, 1951), 2:51 [*cĕragu māsiyunnānu*]; 2:73 [*icccinā mañcide*].

some days you don't.
Time doesn't flow evenly.

Never mind if he doesn't pay.

If I don't remember the good times,
God won't be good to me.
Why hesitate?
He's one of us.
Time goes, but the deed survives.

Never mind if he doesn't pay.

What's lost if he comes today?
Can I forget how he made love?
I don't want to be blamed.
Boats go on carts,
and carts on boats.

Never mind if he doesn't pay.

A Young Woman to a Friend[3]

These women, they deceived me.
They told me he was a woman,
and now my heart is troubled
by what he did.

First I thought
she was my aunt and uncle's daughter,
so I bow to her, and she blesses me:
"You'll get married soon,
don't be bashful. *I* will bring you
the man of your heart."

"Those firm little breasts of yours
will soon
grow round and full," she says.

And she fondles them
and scratches them
with the edge of her nail.

"Come eat with me," she says,
as she holds me close
and feeds me as at a wedding.

3. Kṣetrayya, *Padamulu,* ed. Vissa Appa Rao (Rajahmundry: Saraswati Power Press, 1963), no. 264 [*mosabuccir'amma magavāni yāḍat'anta*]; translation reprinted from *When God is a Customer,* 70–71.

Those women, they told me he was a woman!

Then she announces:
"My husband is not in town.
Come home with me."
So I go and sleep in her bed.

After a while she says,
"I'm bored. Let's play
a kissing game, shall we?
Too bad we're both women."

Then, as she sees me falling asleep,
off my guard,
she tries some
strange things on me.

Those women, they told me he was a woman!

She says, "I can't sleep.
Let's do what men do."
Thinking "she" was a woman,
I get on top of him.

Then he doesn't let go:
he holds me so tight
he loses himself in me.
Wicked as ever, he declares:

"I am your Muvvagopala!"
And he touches me expertly
and makes love to me.

Those women, they told me he was a woman!

The Madam to a Courtesan[4]

Woman! He's none other
than Cĕnnuḍu of Pālagiri.
Haven't you heard?
He rules the worlds.

When he wanted you, you took his gold—
but couldn't you tell him your address?
Some lover you are!
He's hooked on you.

4. Kṣetrayya, *Padamulu,* ed. Vissa Appa Rao, no. 176 [*cĕllabo pālagiri cĕnnuḍe vīḍu kŏmma*]; reprinted from *When God is a Customer,* 63–64.

And he rules the worlds.

I found him wandering the alleyways,
too shy to ask anyone.
I had to bring him home with me.
Would it have been such a crime
if you or your girls
had waited for him by the door?
You really think it's enough
to get the money in your hand?
Can't you tell who's big, who's small?
Who do you think he is?

And he rules the worlds.

This handsome Cĕnnuḍu of Pālagiri,
this Muvvagopāla,
has fallen to your lot.
When he said he'd come tomorrow,
couldn't you consent
just a little?
Did you really have to say no?
What can I say about you?

And he rules the worlds.

A Courtesan to the Messenger[5]

Don't go on chattering, just go away.
Why should he come here?
Tell him not to come.

It all happened so long ago,
in a different age,
another life.
Who is he to me, anyway?

Think of the long nights I spent
waiting for him, minute after minute,
saying to myself, "He'll come today,
he'll come tomorrow!"—

the hot sighs,
lips dry with longing,

5. Kṣetrayya, *Padamulu,* ed. Vissa Appa Rao, no. 283 [*vadaraka po pove*]; reprinted from *When God is a Customer,* 109–10.

nights aflame with moonlight.
What more is there to say?

Just go away!

I wore myself out watching the road.
Counting the moons, I grieved.
Holding back a love I could not hold,

listening to the screeching
of peacocks and parrots,
I passed the months of spring.
Let's have no more empty words.

Just go away!

I even asked the birds for omens
if Muvvagopala was coming.
I grew weak, watching my girlfriends
join their husbands for love.

O god, do I ever have to see
his face again
with this body of mine?
Once was enough!

Just go away!

[This *padam* is said to have been composed in two stages. When the court poets of Vijayarāghavanāyaka at Tanjavur complained to the king that he was elevating Kṣetrayya—an "unlearned" singer, more at home with courtesans than with scholars—to an undeserved status, Kṣetrayya sang all but the last two lines of this *padam* and went away, leaving the king's poets to complete it. They were unequal to this task and eventually begged Kṣetrayya himself to complete the poem upon his return to Tanjavur. The story attempts to assimilate Kṣetrayya to the familiar status of a court poet—despite the obvious inappropriateness of this category for a peripatetic devotional singer of love songs addressed to the god.]

TWENTY

Śatakas

A vast literature, beginning with Pālkuriki Somanātha's *Vṛṣâdhipa-śatakamu* in the thirteenth century and continuing up to the present day, was composed in the formal structure of *śataka(mu)*—literally, a century, with approximately 100 verses addressed to a deity, a guru, or, later, some other person (a courtesan, a friend, even a cat). The earlier, largely hymnal or devotional themes eventually gave way to a wider range, including statements of deep personal feeling, social criticism, political satire, jokes, curses, and so on.[1] Each individual verse in the *śatakamu* is highly portable, devoid of narrative or other context, so it could be easily memorized and quoted as a unit. Statistically, *śataka* is certainly the largest genre in Telugu.

To some extent, we may observe a correlation between the efflorescence of this flexible and expressive genre and a perceived disturbance in the established political order—as, for example, in the satirical *śatakas* addressed to temple deities in the seventeenth century that reflected the political weakness of Andhra at that time. No poet who had a sustained and stable relationship with a patron composed a *śataka* for that patron; rather, these works emerged from individual poets not integrated into any particular community or courtly setting. Equally symptomatic of this genre is a certain freedom or relaxation in the standards of language and meter. Some *śataka* writers, such as Dhūrjaṭi at Kāḷahasti and Śeṣappa-kavi in his *Narasiṃha-śatakamu,* make explicit ideological statements about this freedom from constraint and lack of formal training:

1. See the essay on this genre, "Afterword," by Narayana Rao in Hank Heifetz and Velcheru Narayana Rao, trans., *For the Lord of the Animals: The Kāḷahastīśvara Śatakamu of Dhūrjaṭi* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

I have not studied the five great *kāvyas,*
the texts in metrics, or grammar,
or Amara's dictionary. I compose
through your kindness; it isn't a talent
of my own. If I make a mistake, it's not because
I lack devotion. If the sugarcane grows crooked,
is it any less sweet?[2]

Note that this stance reflects a radical departure from the perception of language implicit in the works of the courtly poets and the formal theorists such as Appakavi.

DHŪRJAṬI

The first of the *śataka* poets represented here is Dhūrjaṭi (see p. 191), writing at Kāḷahasti in the sixteenth century—the only *śataka* poet to produce truly great poetry, of a highly personal and lyrical texture, in this form.[3] Note that each *śataka* verse ends with a *makuṭam* refrain in the vocative, addressed to the god or other subject.

Kāḷahastīśvara-śatakamu[4]

Just because I'm drunk on the games of love
and have ignored you, now that I'm drowning
in the tides of hell, you couldn't care less.
Listen, lord of Kāḷahasti:
if a boy gets lost in play
and happens to fall into a well,
won't his father be alarmed?

"Eat your rice and milk, my little one."
"I won't."
"Come, quickly, just a taste."
"No, not unless you bring me sweet bananas too."
What mother or father could resist,
O lord of Kāḷahasti?
Won't they rush out to bring the bananas
and then tenderly,
ever so playfully,
coax their child to eat?

2. Śeṣappa-kavi, *Narasiṃha-śatakamu* (Madras: Balasarasvati Book Depot, 1984), 2. *tappu galagina sadbhakti takkuv′ auñe cĕrakunaku vaṅka poyina cĕḍuně tīpu.*

3. See the complete translation in Heifetz and Narayana Rao, *For the Lord of the Animals.* The verses cited below are new translations by the present authors.

4. Dhūrjaṭi, *Kāḷahastīśvara-śatakamu,* ed. Nidudavolu Venkata Rao (Vijayawada: Emesco, 1990), 5, 52, 76, 75.

When I remember what came before,
the dreadful times I have known,
I feel disgust.
When I look back at all the dying
and forward to the deaths still in store,
suddenly there is fear.
When I look at myself
or think about my shifting modes,
terror holds me
and time goes black,
O lord of Kāḷahasti.

You make us taste, see, hear, smell,
touching body to body
in deep delight.
So why tell us these acts
are wrong? Are you playing
with us for fun, or just
to pass the time?
What's the point,
Lord of Kāḷahasti?

KAN˜CARLA GOPANNA [RA˜MADA˜SU]

Kañcarla Gopanna, also known as Rāmadāsu, was the tax collector (*tahsildār*) at Bhadrâcalam under Abu 'l-Hasan Tanashah [Telugu Taniṣah] of Golconda. He was the nephew of the famous Brahmin ministers Akkanna and Mādanna. The tradition has it that he took money from the treasury to build the Bhadrâcalam Rāma temple and was imprisoned for this for twelve years; during these years he composed beautiful *kīrtana*s to Lord Rāma (*Bhadrādri rāmadāsu kīrtanalu*), until Rāma himself, together with his brother Lakṣmaṇa, went in disguise to the Sultan, paid him the cash that was missing (six lakhs of rupees), and insisted on taking a receipt—which they showed to the jailer in order to release the poet. Since that time, the rulers of Golconda and, later, Hyderabad have been patrons of the Rāma temple, to which they send gifts each year at the time of the *rāma-navami* festival.

Dāśarathi śatakamu[5]

He's fierce in battle,
friend to those in pain,
famed for his wild and furious aim

5. Kañcarla Gopanna, *Dāśarathi śatakamu,* in *Śataka-ratnamulu* (Vijayavada: Sri Sailaja Publications, 1990), 34.

when he shoots burning arrows
from his bow.
No god ever
equals Rāma,
Daśaratha's son,
flooded with compassion,
on this earth.
I'm going to climb onto a proud elephant and,
beating a battle drum, pound these words
into the air, until they permeate
earth and space.

KĀSULA PURUṢOTTAMAKAVI

Many Telugu *śatakas* from the late medieval period sound a stylized note of attack: the temple is portrayed as damaged and in decline, and the poet playfully and somewhat bitterly denounces the god for his ineptitude and weakness in allowing this state to come about. The *Veṅkaṭâcala-vihāra-śatakamu* adds the theme of Muslim depredation, in the face of which the god is unaccountably passive. To some extent, these works reflect the historical situation of Muslim advance deep into Andhra. On another level, however, their tone is a variation of *nindā-stuti,* "praise-through-blame"—a prominent form in medieval south India.

Kāsula Puruṣottamakavi was the court poet of Yarlagaḍḍa Aṅkinīḍu Prasādu I of Callapalli, Kṛṣṇa District (r. 1792?–1819), and perhaps of this king's father as well. The temple of Śrīkākuḷeśvara-Viṣṇu, known as Āndhra Nāyaka, is a major shrine in the Kṛṣṇa Delta; this temple is the site of Kṛṣṇadevarāya's famous dream, which impelled him to compose the *Āmukta-mālyada* (see p. 168). The *makuṭam* refrain, characteristic for these *śatakas,* refers to the god as *hata-vimata-jīva,* "killer of false believers"—a suggestion of religious conflict of a new type in this period. The tone of taunting and upbraiding the deity is consistent throughout. Three other epithets complete the refrain: *citra-citra-prabhāva, dākṣinya-bhāva, śrīkākuḷândhra-deva*—"god of many miracles," "darling of women," "lord of Andhra in Śrīkākuḷam." We have distributed these ironic vocatives through the verses of our translation.

Āndhra-nāyaka-śatakamu[6]

Your wife, the Earth, is the stable one.
Because of her, they say you can bear anything.
Your other wife, Goddess of Wealth, gives what people want.

6. Kāsula Puruṣottamakavi, *Āndhra-nāyaka śatakamu,* ed. Yarlagadda Balagangadhara Ravu (Visakhapatnam: Nirmala Publications, 1975).

Because of her, people say you are generous.
Brahmā, who creates the world, is born out of you.
That's why people think you're a big family man.
The Ganges, who washes away evil, is your daughter.
She's made you into someone who redeems the fallen.
It's your wives and children who bring you fame.
In yourself, god of many miracles, from the beginning
you're a good-for-nothing.[7] [26]

Some people say your image is nothing but a rock
carved with feeling, and you're not in it.
Some say if you *were* there,
you would surely show some sign.
Some say you've taken the form of Buddha
and sit there, impassive, seeing but pretending not to see.
Some say God's ways are mysterious:
who can know what will happen?
That's how they talk, because now,
killer of false believers,
the temple life has gone dead. [11]

If Śrīkākuḷam is famous among the 108 temples,
if it's true that you are known in all lands as "lord of Andhra,"
if it's true that you showed your hair to confirm the word of your priest,[8]
if it's true that, though you live in heaven, you came of your own will
into this image,[9] to be worshiped,
then why don't you restore the daily rites and festivals?
Otherwise, lord of Andhra in Śrīkākuḷam,
no one will ever know. [12]

The demon-king hit the pillar with anger,
because he was confident you weren't there.[10]
Aśvatthāma sent an arrow at the womb of Uttara,

7. Dāmodara, one of the names of Viṣṇu, means to a "good-for-nothing" in colloquial Telugu usage.

8. A priest at the Śrīkākuḷam temple had a mistress to whom he used to give the garland meant for the god, before presenting it to the deity. One day the king noticed that the garland had a long hair in it and asked why. The priest, in a panic, lied: "The god has long hair." To confirm this, the king had a hole drilled in the back of the temple wall, through which he could view the image of the god from behind. The priest prayed all night to the god, asking him to help him, and when the king came in the morning to peep in, the image was covered with long dark hair. (This local myth at Śrīkākuḷam was narrated to us at the site in February 1986.)

9. The *arcâvatāra,* in the poet's word.

10. Hiraṇyakaśipu denied Viṣṇu's presence in a pillar; the god emerged from the pillar as the Man-Lion, to kill him.

because he thought you weren't there.[11]
The Kaurava sent his angry son to the forest
where the Pāṇḍavas were living,
because he assumed you weren't there.[12]
Duryodhana had Draupadi disrobed in his own court,
because he was certain you weren't there.[13]
You weren't there, in any of these places,
but then suddenly you *were* there.
And you were certainly *here* before,
killer of false believers.
Why can't you come back now? [9]

Darling of women,
you should have feathers on your head.
You're not a king to wear a crown.
You should have wildflowers around your neck.
Are you a lord of the land, to flaunt a pearl necklace?
You should be holding a flute.
You're no warrior, to carry a sword.
Your body should smell like a cowpen.
Are you a prince, perfumed with sandal?
The whole world knows you're just a cowherd,
god of many miracles.
Don't pretend to be king. [19]

11. After the Mahābhārata war, Aśvatthāma hurled his magic weapon to destroy all unborn embryos in the wombs of the Pāṇḍava widows; Uttarā, widow of Abhimanyu, then gave birth to a stillborn child, who was revived by Kṛṣṇa.

12. Dhṛtarāṣṭra sent Duryodhana to the forest, where he was captured by Citrasena, the Gandharva; the Pāṇḍavas released him and his brothers.

13. Duryodhana ordered Draupadi to be disrobed publicly in his court, but Kṛṣṇa supplied an endless series of saris to protect her honor.

TWENTY-ONE

Cāṭu Verses

Until relatively recently, whenever connoisseurs of poetry would meet, they would quote to one another from memory oral verses known as *cāṭus,* usually ascribed to the classical poets and often associated with a story. Such verses conjured up images of kings, courtesans, great poets, and scholars—in short, an entire literary milieu, in which the classical texts of the literary tradition could be situated and commented upon. In some ways, these oral verses constitute a particularly penetrating form of literary criticism, highlighting stylistic and thematic features of the poets in question, pitting one voice against another in profound intertextual modes, and bringing powerful narrative contexts into play. In addition to literary-critical and metapoetic statements, these verses also subvert figures of authority, patrons, and pedants and offer social criticism in various wide-ranging forms.

The ascription of a *cāṭu* verse to a particular, well-known poet often merely hides the popular provenance of the poem, which is meant to express a certain understanding of that poet, his style, and his role in the literary culture. Historians of literature have often misunderstood this dynamic and taken the poems to be literally authored by their imputed "authors," thereby missing the social function of the *cāṭu* and its communal authorship. Moreover, these verses, taken together, have a systemic quality that underlies the densely textured and conceptually interconnected nature of this tradition. Thus a *cāṭu* may look, deceptively, like a single, isolated poem; in fact, it resonates as part of a much wider system.[1]

1. For further examples, see Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman, *A Poem at the Right Moment: Remembered Verses from Premodern South India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). The poems below are excerpted from this work.

BACK TO ME

Full red lips, breasts, curls,
darting eyes that steal the heart:
so what if you show me
none of these; what if
you turn the other way?
Can't I make do
with your curved and ravishing behind
and your coiled braid?
Is there merit on one side of the river
and no fun on the other side
when the full moon flashes in the water
like your smile?[2]

GREETINGS TO MY FRIENDS

The monkey on the temple wall,
the priest's pretty wife,
the whore who walks the street,
the wild wind that howls outside—

if you're going to the village,
say hi to them
for me.[3]

WHAT'S WRONG?

"Is he a good lover?"
"He's great."
"Is he inventive in bed?"
"Full of ideas."
"Handsome?"
"He beats the god of love himself."
"But does he love you?"
"Like no other."
"If that is so, why are you running around
with other men?"
"You're bold, you're experienced,

2. Ascribed to Tĕnāli Ramaliṅgaḍu, addressing a woman turned away from him in bed.
3. Ascribed to Śrīnātha, nostalgic for the village of Aḍigŏppula.

you ought to know about these things.
There's only one thing wrong with him:
he happens to be
my husband."[4]

NOT ENTIRELY HIDDEN

Not entirely hidden,
like the enormous breasts of those Gujarati women,
and not open to view,
like a Tamil woman's breasts,
but rather
like the supple, half-uncovered breasts
of a Telugu girl,
neither concealed nor exposed:

that's how a poem should be composed.
Anything else
is a joke.

LOVE LETTER

Dear X,
Your tiny waist (almost not there),
your grace, the gentle
way you walk—
I bless all these, for they
are yours.
Hoping you're well.
I'm well enough.
Please send me news,
good news,
since every moment
I want you more.

Sincerely yours,

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

People with no taste for poetry
are no different from cattle,

4. Ascribed to Śrīnātha.

though they don't chew grass.
Lucky for the cows.[5]

DROWNING

Let the Love God aim his arrows
at me. I don't care.
Let him attack me, with his flag unfurled.
I'll tell the truth, loud and clear.
Whenever that wide-eyed girl looks at me,
there's a flood: the lotuses are up to their necks,
and the fish are in over their heads.[6]

TOPS

One day a courtesan embraced the famous poet Kūcimañci Timmakavi in the middle of the street; embarrassed, Timmakavi turned away his face. She then asked him:

"You're the best of all my lovers, which is why
I hugged you. You think it's fair
to turn your face away?
I thought you had good taste!"

Timmakavi replied:

"Not at all, my dear.
I was just trying to see
if those two breasts of yours,
spinning like tops made of gold,
had shot through my chest
and come out behind me."

PHILOSOPHERS

They're penetrating and profound
in their discussions, those awesome
scholars of Rajahmundry,
tirelessly trying to render judgment

5. Maḍiki Siṅganna, *Sakala-nīti-sammatamu,* ed. Nidudavolu Venkata Ravu and Ponangi Srirama Appa Ravu (Hyderabad: Andhra Pradesh Sahitya Akademi, 1970), 31.

6. The eyes of a beautiful woman are conventionally compared to lotus flowers or to darting fish.

whether through contingent destruction of a prior existent
or *a priori* nonexistence and consequent nonappearance

as in the case, e.g., of flowers
growing in the sky,

at the very source of the Tree of Life,
with its brilliant roots, its branches and leaves
unfolding from a delectable
woman's body, down below,

there is, or is not, evidence
of pubic hair.[7]

7. Attributed to Śrīnātha, who is said to have felt contempt for the learned pandits of Rajahmundry. Andhra women shaved off their pubic hairs. The verse is built around the ironic use of technical Sanskrit terms from the domain of formal logic.

TWENTY-TWO

Śāhāji

r. 1684–1712

This Maratha king of Tañjāvūr, in the Kaveri delta, was also a major Telugu poet—indeed, his considerable literary activity was almost entirely in Telugu, although his mother tongue must have been Marathi. His father, Ekoji, conquered Tañjāvūr in 1676 from its Madurai overlords and founded the dynasty of Maratha kings. Their court was the scene of scintillating literary production, mostly in Telugu and Sanskrit, in genres continuing the Nāyaka-period productions: *yakṣagānas, kuravañcis, dvipada kāvyas, padams,* and popular dance-dramas that go by other names. These texts all integrated musical and verbal performance. Śāhāji, who came to the throne at the age of twelve, was also the author of over 200 *padams* on the god of Tiruvārūr (*Tyageśa-padamulu*) and of a long series of texts meant to be produced at court; in this period, in general, written texts were primarily scores for theatrical or musical performance. Śāhāji is the subject of a well-known Sanskrit "biography" by one of his court poets, Ayyāvāl (*Śāhendra-vilāsa*). Śāhāji also patronized Sanskrit scholars, and whole areas of Sanskrit erudition—in particular, grammar (*vyākaraṇa*)—flourished in Tañjāvūr during his rule. There was also considerable activity centered on the copying and preserving of manuscripts (including some Telugu manuscripts copied in Nagari script);[1] this king began the collection that subsequently became the famous Sarasvati Mahal Library in Tañjāvūr.

The *Sati-dāna-śūramu* is a work of extreme, deliberately outrageous provocation: a liaison is established between a Brahmin and an Untouchable woman, with the active connivance of the woman's husband. The text frames

1. We know, for example, from the *Dvipada-bhārata*—a multiauthored text from this period—that a royal official, Nimbāji, had the text copied by a scribe named Kuppayya-mantri for Śāhāji.

this drama with reference to the festival for Rāja-gopāla-svāmi/Viṣṇu at Mannārkuḍi, some thirty kilometers south of Tañjāvūr city; apparently, the play was intended to be performed annually as part of the ritual, in celebration of the annual remarriage of the Untouchable couple after the rupture created by the Brahmin's infatuation. In the course of the text, well-known Sanskrit verses are cited verbatim and translated into Telugu—usually by the Brahmin's foolish acolyte—thus producing a fine texture of parody-by-context.

TAKE MY WIFE[2]

Stage manager:[3] Now that we have invoked all the gods, let's summarize the plot of the play called "Take my Wife," by King Shāhā.

A Brahmin comes to see the Viṣṇu festival.
He falls in love with an Outcaste woman
and chats her up. Her husband arrives,
and liberates all four.[4] The play celebrating
this story was made by King Shāhā
to outlast the sun, moon, and stars.

Now that we know the theme, here comes Vighneśvara[5] in response to our prayers.

His earrings flashing, swaying,
golden Gaṇapati has arrived.
Attendants serve him as he comes,
sweet cakes in his hand,
dressed auspiciously, riding his rat.

Now that all obstacles have been removed by Vighneśvara's arrival, what happens next? The herald announces Rāja-gopāla-svāmi, the lord of Mannārkuḍi.

This herald is dressed like a clown:
Viṣṇu's feet mark his forehead. A long stick

2. Śāhāji, "Sati-dāna-śūramu," in *Yakṣa-gānamulu (Tañjāvūru),* ed. Ganti Jogisomayaji, Andhra University Series, no. 57 (Kakinada: Andhra Visvakala Parisattu, 1957), 199–268.

3. Invocations to Viṣṇu, Tyāgeśa, Gaṇapati, Sarasvati, again Mahāviṣṇu, and Pārvatī-Parameśvara precede this beginning. The translation omits occasional repetitions and abbreviates some passages.

4. Including the Brahmin's student.

5. Gaṇapati.

in his hand. A long cloth tight around his waist.
Flowers in his hair. Crooked teeth protruding,
with a big guffaw.

No sooner has he informed everyone of Rāja-gopāla's arrival than the latter appears, together with the goddess Lakṣmi, for his festival.

Dark peacock feathers in his hair,
golden clothes upon his body, as if lightning were wound
around him, with fresh basil as his ornament,
he has come to fold me into his emerald arms
in a dream.[6]

While Viṣṇu is sitting in state in the Campaka Forest,[7] a Mataṅga woman[8] comes to see his festival.

Her feet tender as leaf buds,
with toe rings and other ornaments,
bracelets and bells chiming,
a cynosure for all eyes,
a row of bells hanging from a golden string
around her buttocks, and chains of emeralds,
she is brilliant as the sun.
Her eyes black with mascara,
a dot of musk on her forehead,
she has a companion on either side
and a single purpose—to see the festival.

She sings before the god, with her native skill. Now, as she waits in a pleasant spot, what happens? A good Brahmin named Morobhaṭlu comes to visit the god's festival.

Reciting the Vedas, meditating on Viṣṇu,
Morobhaṭlu the Magnificent appears.

On his way, he notices something remarkable and says to his student:

Guru: I just saw something really cool.

Pupil: Did you say "ghoul"? I'm afraid.

Guru: No ghoul. It's a beautiful woman.

Pupil: But you already have a woman.

6. This verse is in Sanskrit.
7. Mannārkuḍi, the family shrine for the Tañjāvūr kings.
8. Outcaste; indeed, the lowest of the outcastes.

Guru: That's not what I mean. It's a jewel of a woman.

Pupil: A jewel is a kind of stone. [*Aside*]: For smashing your head.

Guru: Not a stone. A human being.

Pupil: She belongs to somebody else. How can you want her?

Guru: Can't you admit that she's beautiful?

Pupil: If you say so.

Guru [*singing and dancing*]:

A woman, a bunch of flowers,
a golden doll, an arrow of the love-god,
a streak of lightning, a vine, a parrot
in the hand of Pleasure,[9] a sweet woman,
a golden string. . . .

Pupil: My teacher has gone crazy.

Guru: I'm not crazy. That's the nature of the thing. Let me explain.

rahaḥ-pracāra-kuśalā mṛdu-gadgada-bhāṣiṇī
kaṃ kaṃ nārī na kurute raktaṃ raktânta-locanā

Pupil: What does that mean?

Guru: That thing is entirely charming, lovely; she speaks with a gentle, intoxicating voice. If you see a woman like that, who will fail to fall in love? And let me tell you something more.

strîti nāmâpi samhlādi vikiraty eva mānasam
kiṃ punar darśanaṃ tasyāḥ vilāsollāsita-bhruvaḥ

Pupil: Translate, please.

Guru: You might be deep in meditation or yoga or some other discipline, but the moment you hear the syllables "woman" you let it all fall away, and your mind flows toward her. You become agitated. What is more, who could possibly control the mind when looking at a woman whose very eyebrows captivate with their grace?

Pupil: It's true. You're really crazy. Do you want to hear how?

udarka-phalam icchadbhis sadbhir naivâvalokyate
cāṭurthī-candra-rekheva para-strī-phāla-paṭṭikā

Guru: Please translate.

9. Rati, the wife of Manmatha.

Pupil: Those good people who desire *dharma* and *mokṣa* should never look at another man's wife. How is that? You should avoid her, as one avoids seeing the moon on Gaṇeśa's festival.[10]

Guru: Just because we say we shouldn't look at her, will the mind obey? Listen.

kuṅkuma-paṅka-kaḷankita-dehā
pīna-payodhara-kampita-hārā
nūpura-haṃsa-raṇat-padapadmā
kaṃ na vaśī-kurute bhuvi rāmā

Pupil: Meaning?

Guru: This woman, first of all, is light-skinned, with saffron powder on top, big breasts, and a necklace of precious gems and pearls dangling over them. The anklets and bells on her feet are jingling. Can anyone help but fall in love with her?

Pupil: You're truly crazy, and getting worse. Listen.

mukhaṃ śleṣmâgāraṃ tad api ca śaśâṅkena tulitam
stanau māṃsa-granthī kanaka-kalaśāv ity upamitau
sravan-mūtra-klinnaṃ kari-vara-śira-spardhi[11] *-jaghanam*
muhur nindyaṃ rūpaṃ kavi-jana-viśeṣair guru-kṛtam

Guru: Meaning?

Pupil: Listen to me, my master. They see her face dripping with snot and compare it to the moon. Her breasts, just balls of flesh, are said to be golden pitchers. Her buttocks, filthy with shit and piss, are like an elephant's head. This horrible female form is celebrated by poets. You, and they, are crazy—not me.

Guru: Not true. Let me tell you how she really looks.

The peacock, in despair that he is unequal to her long braid,
gets lost among the snakes.
The moon can't compete with her lovely face,
so it hides on Śiva's head.
The bees aren't half as beautiful as her hidden hair,
so they bury themselves in flowers.
I swear to you, with my hand on your head:[12]
I've never seen a woman so charming.

10. *Gaṇeśa-cāṭurthī.* People believe that if you see the moon on the evening of this day, your name will be tarnished.

11. Sic (for *śiraḥ-spardhi*).

12. The conventional mode of taking an oath.

Pupil: Śiva, Śiva! Why touch my head? Swear by the broken pot in your house.

Guru: I'm taking an oath.

Pupil: To hell with your oath. I swear, what you say is a lie. Listen to what I say.

āvartas saṃśayānām avinaya-bhavanaṃ pattanam sāhasānām
doṣāṇāṃ saṃnidhānaṃ kapaṭa-śata-mayaṃ kṣetram apratyayānām
mokṣa-dvārasya vighnaṃ naraka-pura-mukhaṃ sarva-māyā-karaṇḍam
strī-yantraṃ kena sṛṣṭaṃ viṣam amṛta-mayaṃ sarva-lokaika-pāśaḥ[13]

Guru: Translate.

Pupil: A woman is a whirlpool of doubts. A house of disobedience. A city of adventure. Always close to trouble. Full of wiles. A pit of downfall. The obstacle at the doorway to freedom. The direct route to hell. A treasury of all illusion. Who created this trap called "woman"? Though she is pure poison, she appears like delicious nectar. She is a noose around everyone's neck.

Take it from me, my good Brahmin.
Why should we be bothered by her today?
Let go of this infatuation; stop arguing.
It's time we went home.

Guru: Listen to me, young man. Who needs a house, a family, a wife, children?

Pupil: So you're thinking of renouncing the world, shaving your head, putting on ocher robes, and taking a staff and a water pot? Is that your plan?

Guru: No way.

Why think of a wife, why think of a home?
I'm in love with this girl, soft as jasmine.
I can't stop thinking about her.
Why do rituals, why study the Vedas?
It's enough to speak once with her.
I have no use for that insipid bliss, called eternal.
She will bring my body to heaven
with her body.

13. Bhaṛtrhari, *Śataka-trayam,* ed. D. D. Kosambi (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1946), 2.45.

Pupil: Someone like you should instruct those like me, who lack wisdom. If you fall for a woman, your reputation will be ruined.

Guru: You crazy idiot! What does my reputation lack? Better men than I couldn't control themselves when they saw a woman. How can I?

viśvāmitra-parāśara-prabhṛtayo vātāmbu-parṇāśanās
te ′pi strī-mukha-paṅkajaṃ sulalitaṃ dṛṣṭvaiva mohaṃ gatāḥ
śālyannaṃ saghṛtam payo-dadhi-yutaṃ ye bhuñjate mānavās
teṣām indriya-nigraho yadi bhaved vindhyas taret sāgare

Pupil: Meaning?

Guru: Those great sages such as Viśvāmitra and Parāśara, who lived on wind, water, and dry leaves, still fell in love as soon as they saw the face of a beautiful woman. People like us, who feast on good rice, fresh ghee, milk, and curds have no hope of self-control any more than the Vindya Mountains can float across the sea. You want to know what I want?

muditaḥ kadā śayiṣye
mukham idam āghrāya mukulitâpāṅgam
manda-smitaṃ ratânte
muktātāṭaṅka-mudrita-kapolam

Pupil: Translate, please.

Guru: When will I sleep with her on a bed of flowers? I want to kiss that sweet, smiling face after making love with my eyes half-closed. I want to fall asleep on top of her, her earrings pressed into my face.[14] Wherever I look, I see her. Listen:

prāsāde sā diśi diśi ca sā pṛṣṭhatas sā puras sā
paryante sā pathi pathi ca sā tad-viyogâturasya
ha ha cetaḥ prakṛtir aparā nâsti me kâpi sā sā
sā sā sā sā jayati[15] *sakale ko ′yam advaita-vādaḥ*

In the house: her.
Wherever I look: her.
Behind me: her.
Before me: her.
Beside me: her.
On every path: her.
Separated from her,

14. The guru translates his own verse as if reading *mukulitâpāṅgaḥ* and *-mudrita-kapolaḥ* in the nominative.

15. Other versions read *jagati.*

I have no other self, only
her her her her her her
everywhere, in everything.
And philosophers *talk* about oneness! [16]

You want me to come home? Why should I?

Stage manager: The Brahmin and his pupil are going on about this. Listen to how the Guru attacks the Moon and the Love God, his tormentors.

Guru: *tava kusuma-śaratvaṃ śīta-raśmitvam indor*
dvayam idam ayathârtham dṛśyate mad-vidheṣu
visṛjati hima-garbhair agnim indur mayūkhais
tvam api kusuma-bāṇān vajra-sārī karoṣi[17]

God of desire, your arrows are flowers,
or so they say, and they claim
the moon's rays are cool.
If you ask me, neither is true.
Icy moonbeams burn like fire,
and your flowers hit
harder than rock.

Pupil: Gurusvāmi, learned teacher. You want to leave your own house and wife and family, and you'll be happy if this wife of somebody or other just says a word to you? You say you'll be translated bodily to heaven. But to me she looks like a demoness.

darśanād dharate cittaṃ sparśanād dharate balam
saṅgamad dharate vīryaṃ nārī pratyakṣa-rākṣasī

With a single look, she steals your mind.
With a touch, she robs you of strength.
Sleep with her, and she takes your energy.
There's no demon like a woman.

Guru: She's no demon, she's a woman. Go ask her who she is.

Pupil: Great! I've had enough of this teacher-student stuff. I'm not going near any demon. I'm scared.

Guru: You're scared while I'm here?

16. This famous verse is often attributed to Amaru, though it is not found in most manuscripts of *Amaru-śataka.*

17. *Abhijñāna-śākuntala of Kālidāsa,* 3.3.

Pupil: Fine, fine. The texts say: *brāhmaṇârthe gavârthe vā samyak prāṇān parityajet.* You should give up your life to save a Brahmin or a cow. You're a Brahmin, and, what is more, my guru. For your sake, I'm handing over my life to her. Hold on to me tightly. [*To the audience:*] Listen, respected sirs. My teacher wants to send me to this demon. Maybe one of you would like to volunteer in my place?

From the audience: Are you crazy? It's your job. Go.

Pupil [*To the teacher*]: You're an old man. Learned, too. With a house, wife, and children. I'm young. I have yet to gain knowledge, a wife, a house, a family. It makes no difference if you live or die, so you should go.

Stage manager: Still, the pupil goes and asks the Outcaste woman:

Pupil: Hey you, are you a spirit, a ghoul, a demon, or a human being? My teacher sent me to find out. [*To the audience:*] Listen, respected sirs. Three times I've called out to her, and she doesn't respond. You are my witnesses. I did my job. I'm out of here.

Stage manager: Now he comes back to report to his teacher.

Pupil:

I asked, and she said nothing.
She was angry, and wouldn't speak her mind.
She told me to get lost.
You'll have to ask her yourself.

Guru: Fine, I will make her talk.

[*To the Mātaṅgi*]:

May you have pleasure, and many children.
You have beautiful eyes. Listen to me.
Where are you from? What is your name?
What caste? Tell me, please.
Your charm has turned me to ashes.
Please talk to me.

Pupil: Why are wasting your time on her? You're wearing a sacred thread, a light-red *dhoti,* with sandal and sacred rice on your forehead. She's disgusting. It's like an elephant talking to a goat.

Mātaṅgi: We're Untouchables. If you touch us, you become unclean.
Don't come close. We're Mādigas, working with leather.
Our huts are to the east of the village.
Everybody insults us, and you're a Brahmin.
We eat beef, we drink liquor.

We don't know how to speak well.
Don't talk to me.

Pupil: My god! Why did you come here? Come away. Where have your Vedas and Purāṇas and Śāstras disappeared to? I came to study with you because you are a learned man, and here you are deep in conversation with a Mātaṅgi.

Guru: Wait, I have to respond to her.

Pupil: In that case, I don't want to be around. I'm off. I'm still young, unmarried. If you hang out with Untouchables, and I'm close by, no one will give me their daughter. I'll keep my distance.

Guru [*to the Mātaṅgi*]: You said you're Untouchable, but there's no blame in that. *We* are also Untouchable. Let me explain.

You said you shouldn't be touched, which means
you're pure as fire. All I want is to touch you.

You said you're beyond caste,
so you must be the highest of all.

You said nobody can touch you. I'm for that.
No one, that is, except me.

You said you deal in animal skins.
Are you any different from Lord Śiva?[18]

We drink cows' milk, but you eat the whole cow.
You must be more pure.

Pupil: Do babies who drink their mother's milk eat the whole mother?

Guru: I'm feasting my eyes on your beauty.

vada yojayāmi padayor alaktakam
kalayāni hema-valayāni hastayoḥ
nahanaṃ kacasya vahanaṃ kucasya vā
karavāṇi kīra-vara-vāṇi te ′dhunā

Shall I paint your feet with lac,
or bring you bracelets for your arms?
Shall I comb your hair?
Fondle your breasts?
Command me in honeyed tones.

Mātaṅgi: I have one thing to say to you, great Brahmin.

18. Śiva is draped in an elephant's skin.

The body is impermanent. Only *dharma* lasts.
You can hold up the earth, the whole universe,
but *dharma* is hard to bear.
I'm a woman without caste.
Why bother with me?
Just go home.

Guru: Caste makes no difference. It's quality that counts.

Poison may emerge from the ocean of milk,
but who would eat it?
Does anyone throw away pearls
just because they're born out of an oyster?

Anyway, Śiva himself married a Mātaṅgi woman, from your caste.[19]

Stage manager: Now the Mātaṅgi takes a new tack.

Mātaṅgi: I'm a married woman, aren't I,
so why fall in love with me?
I have a husband, and you're making signs at me.
This isn't right—this rule applies to all castes.
My caste won't accept it.
Your mind must be clouded. If I scream,
my husband will hear. He'll come and beat you up.
Stop this incoherent prattle.

Guru: You should think of me as very handsome.
It will bring you merit.
Why are you threatening me with your husband?
He eats cows, like a demon.
He wears a soiled loincloth.
But as for me—I'm a learned man.
You can test me in all four Vedas and the six Śāstras.

Pupil: So you want *her* to examine you? Eating beef, by the way, is proper for their caste. Do you want them to eat lentils, *vaḍa,* tamarind curry, and watery buttermilk, like us? You're mad.

Mātaṅgi: One shouldn't leave a husband. It's not right for a wife to do.
If you deceive your husband, you lose this world and the next.
Even if he's no good, or a drunkard, or weak,
a husband is your real friend, and your treasure.

Pupil: She's right. She holds to her *dharma.* She is a loyal wife. It's better to serve her than you, now that you've lost your Brahminhood and

19. Durgā is a Mātaṅgi.

your learning. You can beg her as much as you like, fall at her feet, but she won't consent. It's like they say about the buffaloes: *mahiṣyāṃ prasavârtāyāṃ mahiṣo madanâturaḥ,* the cow is in labor when the bull wants to mate. This woman is worried that her fidelity is threatened, and you are lusting after her. It isn't right.

Guru: My words are Veda. Listen to me.
We Brahmins have made up all the rules,
and invented religion. There is no better *dharma*
than satisfying a Brahmin's need.
Don't run away from me, be kind to me.
Great merit will be yours.
Give this Brahmin the gift he asks—
your honeyed lips. Give me your breasts,
as if you were offering me golden vessels.
Give me your loins, like offering land.
Give me your house of love, like offering
a home.[20]

Mātaṅgi: My husband is coming, looking for me.
A real hero. He fought against Karṇa himself.[21]
He wields a sword and a bow, a discus and a club.

Guru: I'm supposed to be frightened of him?
Can white ants affect fire?
Mantras and *yantras* are at my call.
I come from the line of someone
who kicked God on his chest.[22]
Śiva is my deity. I meditate, I bathe, I worship.
If I get angry, I'll curse your husband.

Stage manager: Now Lone Tiger, the Mādiga husband, comes looking for his wife. He thinks she has gone to the Campaka Forest to see the festival, so he searches for her there,

drunk on toddy, unsteady,
twisting his mustaches, proud of his skill.

Pupil: Now we're lost. You've ruined not only yourself but me, too. She told you he would come, but you wouldn't listen. It's still not too late to run away.

20. Each of the gifts is a technical *dāna* offered to Brahmins according to the religious texts—the gifts of vessels, land, and houses.

21. The great hero of the *Mahābhārata* war.

22. Bhṛgu, who was testing the three great gods to see which of them was best.

Guru: You crazy fool! Let him come, let his grandfather come! I'm not afraid. I have a few things to say to him. I won't give up on what I want.

Pupil: You're insane. I won't stick with you. Don't call me your pupil, and I won't call you my teacher. Your time has come. That's why your mind is like this. Don't even hint to him that I'm your student. He can beat us both. You're completely deluded, so you can probably take it. But I'm just a little guy, I can't take even one blow.

Guru: Why are you frightened, when I am near?

Pupil: You're right, I shouldn't be afraid when you are here. And when you are lying there kicking and screaming, should I follow you then, too? Don't mention my name. I swear by *her* feet.

Guru: You swear by her feet? What happened to all the Vedas and Śāstras and Purāṇas?

Pupil: You seem to prefer her feet to all the Vedas and Śāstras! [*To the Mātaṅgi*]: I bless you, Madam. If your husband asks, don't tell him I am this man's student. Please protect me.

Stage manager: The Mādiga husband is here, in the hubbub of the festival. He has found his wife.

Mādiga: What are you doing here, my cunning beauty?
Our kids are hungry in our hut.
The raw skins are not put out to dry.
Strips of meat are waiting to be cooked.
You don't seem to notice.
I looked for you in the garden, looked in the street,
looked in the fields, and at last I have found you here.

Mātaṅgi: I came to the festival. On the way,
this Brahmin saw me. He keeps pestering me.
He's a great Brahmin. It's wrong to talk against him.
So I've been standing here. He's lost his limits,
though he knows our caste. He's begging me.
The more I threaten him, the more he comes on.
He's pleading with me to sleep with him,
even if only once.

Guru [*To the Mātaṅgi*]:

indīvareṇa nayanaṃ mukham ambujena
kundena dantam adharaṃ nava-pallavena
aṅgāni campaka-dalaiś ca vidhāya vedhāḥ
kānte kathaṃ racitavān upalena cetaḥ

He made your eyes from the blue lotus,
your face from the red lotus.
Jasmine for your teeth,
your lips from tender buds,
all the rest of you—from soft *campaka* leaves.
Why, then, did the Creator
fashion your heart from stone?

Pupil: There are so many ways of cursing someone in this world when you get angry, like "you whore," "you bitch," "you slut," and so on. What is this new curse of yours, about a heart made of stone? If you let me curse her, I'll do it properly.

Mādiga: How come you're talking to another man's wife?
Enough of this. Go away.
Remember Kīcaka's troubles, after he fell in love with Draupadi.[23]
Is it not a sin to sleep with another man's wife?
Haven't you read the Śāstras?

Stage manager: The Mādiga tries to hit the Brahmin, but the pupil stands in the way and says:

Pupil: Listen, Lone Tiger. I bless you. My teacher has gone mad. But don't hit him because of his words. He has a family, a wife, a home. If you want to hit him, hit me instead. I'm like a Sannyāsin, a Brahmacāri.

Mādiga:

vipadi dhairyam athābhyudaye kṣamā
sadasi vāk-paṭutā yudhi vikramaḥ
yaśasi câbhirucir vyasanaṃ śrutau
prakṛti-siddham idam hi mahâtmanām

Pupil: You're an outcaste. Do you know the meaning of this text?

Mādiga: Let me tell you what I understand. In disaster, courage; patience in good fortune; eloquence in the assembly; valor in battle; desire for fame; a weakness for learning—all this is second nature to good people. So I've heard, but never seen it with my own eyes. You have now convinced me. I'm happy with your courage, your learning, your wisdom, and I won't hit you or your teacher.

Pupil:

nindantu nīti-nipuṇā yadi vā stuvantu
lakṣmīs samāviṣatu gacchatu vā yathecchaṃ

23. Kīcaka was destroyed by Bhīma after he lusted for Draupadi in Virāṭa; see pp. 82–101.

adyaiva vā maraṇam astu yugântare vā
nyāyāt pathaḥ pravicalanti padaṃ na dhīraḥ

Mādiga: Meaning?

Pupil: Listen, Tiger. We're Brahmins, you're a Mādiga. My master was thinking of doing something unacceptable. You weren't here then. We were afraid of you. When you heard all this, you were angry and came to hit us. We didn't try to attack you. Should we have just stayed passive when you came? *Ātatāyinam āyantaṃ yo na hanyāt sa hanyate:* if you don't strike at one who is coming to attack you, you will be struck yourself. So the Śāstra says. Although you are strong from eating meat and drinking liquor, and armed with weapons, for every four times you hit us we will hit you at least twice with our Brahmin stick. We didn't want to get in your way; even if you become aggressive, we will stick to the path of courage and fairness. Whether those who know the Śāstra of good conduct praise or blame, whether wealth comes or goes, whether death comes right away or after many years, courageous people never stray from the path of justice. Know this, and behave yourself.

Mādiga:

prāṇāṇ api parityajya mānam evâbhirakṣayet
prāṇās taraṅga-capalā mānam ā-candra-tārakam

Maintain your honor even at the risk of your life.
Life is unstable as the waves, but honor lasts forever.

Guru: I'm only following the Code of Desire.
From the moment you want a woman,
she is your wife.
So it's quite legal to sleep with her.
We offer sacrifices to reach the courtesans of the gods.
Is there anything higher than pleasure?
Women are our deities, our treasures.
Without women, what good is life?

Mādiga:

jitendriyatvaṃ vinaya-svalakṣaṇam
guṇa-prakarṣo vinayād avâpyate
guṇâdhike puṃsi jano ʹnurañjate
janânurāga-prabhavā hi sampadaḥ

The nature of humility is self-control.
Excellence issues from humility.
Everybody loves a man of excellence.
Riches accrue from people's love.

So someone as big as you must surely have self-control. Why behave like this?

kulaṃ pavitraṃ jananī kṛtârthā
viśvambharā puṇyavatī ca tena
apāra-sac-cit-sukha-sāgare ′smin
līnaṃ pare brahmaṇi yasya cetaḥ

Whoever loses himself
in perfect awareness
and melts into the ultimate
makes his family pure,
his mother fulfilled,
and the very earth sinless.

Moreover,

vyāghrîva tiṣṭhati jarā paritarjayantī
rogāś ca śatrava iva praharanti deham
āyuḥ parisravati bhinna-ghaṭād ivâmbhaḥ
lokas tathâpy āhitam ācaratîti citram

Old age stalks us like a tigress.
Illness lurks like an enemy in the body.
Life slips away like water from a broken pot.
And still people are set on their own ruin![24]

Stage manager: Thus far the Mādiga. Here is the Brahmin's response:

avidita-sukha-duḥkhaṃ nirguṇaṃ brahma sākṣāj
jaḍa-matir iha kaś-cin mokṣa ity ācacakṣe
mama tu matam anaṅga-smera-tāruṇya-pūrṇa-
stana-bhara-madirâkṣyā nīvi-mokṣo hi mokṣaḥ

Final freedom is that state of no pain,
no pleasure, no qualities, nothing—
or so some idiot has said.

But when a ravishing young woman,
drunk on desire,
is free from her clothes—
that's freedom
for me.

What greater happiness than this? I must have her at least once. I'm not afraid of anything you might do to me. I'll tell you what I think.

24. Bhartṛhari, 3.38.

Where she stands is my earth. When she drinks, there is water. When she looks in the mirror, it holds my fire. When she waves her fan, that is air. Space is what exists in her doorway. These are the five elements of my being. I merge them in her.

Pupil: A big man like you, my master, shouldn't talk like that. Here is how you should be:

gaṅgā-tīre hima-giri-śilābaddha-padmâsanasya
brahma-dhyānâbhyasana-vidhinā yoga-nidrāṃ gatasya
kiṃ tair bhāvyaṃ mama sudivasair yatra te nirviśaṅkāḥ
kaṇḍūyante jaraṭha-hariṇās śṛṅgam aṅge madīye

Good days have come for me.
I sit in yoga on a rock in the mountains, beside the Ganges,
deep in meditation, deep in truth, unmoving
when wandering deer, without fear,
scratch their horns against my body.[25]

mahī mṛdvī śayyā vipula-paridhānam bhuja-latā
vitānaṃ câkāśo vyajanam anukūlo ′yam anilaḥ
sphurad-dīpaś candro virati-vanitâsaṅga-muditas
sukham śāntas śete munir atanu-bhūtir nṛpa iva

The earth his silken bed,
his soft arms for a pillow,
the sky to shelter him above,
a soothing breeze to fan him,
the moon a luminous lamp,
dispassion his passionate love,
and ashes for wealth,
the wise man rests, fully at peace,
richer than any king.[26]

O my master, that's how you should be. Furthermore,

ādityasya gatâgatair ahar ahas saṅkṣīyate jīvitam
vyāpārair bahu-kārya-bhāra-gurubhiḥ kālo na vijñāyate
dṛṣṭvā janma-jarā-vipatti-maraṇam trāsaś ca notpadyate
pītvā mohamayīṃ pramāda-madirām unmatta-bhūtaṃ jagat

Day by day, sunrise by sunset, life slips away.
We're too busy with pressing tasks to notice passing time.

25. Bhartṛhari, 3.98. Attributed to a certain Kṛṣṇa: *Subhāṣita-ratna-koṣa* 1630.
26. Bhartṛhari, 3.94.

We see birth, old age, disaster, death, and still we're not afraid.
Drunk on its own confusion, the world has gone insane.[27]

Stage manager: While the teacher and the student are arguing, something else happens. The Mādiga, contemplating the Brahmin's mood and his readiness to give up his life for the woman, his determination to make love to her even at the risk of being reborn as a demon, decides it would be better simply to give the Brahmin his wife as a gift rather than let her go this way. Anyway, he's a Brahmin, so this sort of a gift to him will make the Mādiga a hero among givers. Moreover, this kind of giving was his family's tradition: *avaśyaṃ pitur ācāraṃ putras tad anuvartate,* a son should always follow his father's path. This principle should be demonstrated to the world. So, looking at the Brahmin, the Mādiga says:

You don't have to beg, Brahmin.
I'll donate my wife to you.
Didn't Hariścandra, one of my people,
sell his wife for truth?[28]
We have a reputation for giving gifts.
I would give you my life itself,
were you to ask, to say nothing
of my wife. Body, family, and wealth
are never permanent: only fame
will last. Take this gift.

Pupil: Teacher, what he says is true. What you wanted is coming true. But don't accept the gift. You have your Brahminhood, the Vedas and the Śāstras to think about. Have a little detachment. Think of the subtle meaning of the Vedic words. Follow the path that will give you this world and the next, so people will praise you.

Stage manager: The Guru listens to his pupil, listens to the Mādiga, and goes into deep meditation, contemplating the meaning of the Veda. In his mind, detachment arises, and he remembers all he has done. He stands up and bows.

Pupil: Śiva, Śiva! Nārāyaṇa! To whom are you bowing? To this Outcaste woman, to the Outcaste man, to the god who fulfilled your desire? But you seem a little pensive. Tell me.

Guru: Listen, O great mind! I bow not to the Mādiga lady, or to her husband, and not even to Lord Śiva.

27. Bhartṛhari, 3.43.

28. King Hariścandra became an Untouchable watchman in the burning-ground after selling his wife and son to keep his word.

Pupil: So were you bowing to your own craziness?

Guru: Listen, O great light!

brahmā yena kulālavan niyamito brahmâṇḍa-bhāṇḍodare
viṣṇur yena daśâvatāra-gahane kṣiptas sadā saṅkaṭe
śambhur yena kapālavān niyamito bhikṣâṭanaṃ kāritas
sūryo bhrāmyati nityam eva gagane tasmai namaḥ karmaṇe

I worship *karma,* constant action
that moves the Creator to make the world, like a potter his pots,
that brings Viṣṇu into birth after difficult birth,
in ten different forms,
that sends Śiva begging for alms, with a skull for his bowl,
that makes the Sun roam the sky.

Because of you, my student, I have realized this truth. *Sat-saṅgatiḥ kiṃ na karoti puṃsām:* people can achieve anything through good company.

santaptâyasi saṃsthitasya payasaḥ nāmâpi na śrūyate
muktâkāratayā tad eva nalinī-patra-sthitaṃ rājate
svātau sāgara-śukti-madhya-patitaṃ tan mauktikaṃ jāyate
prāyeṇâdhama-madhyamottama-guṇas saṃsargato jāyate

A drop of water that falls on heated iron
is lost, without a trace.
This same drop on a lotus leaf
shines spotless as a pearl.
And it *becomes* a pearl if it happens to fall
into an oyster in the sea in the fertile season.
What you are—good, bad, or in between—
depends on whom you're with.

Moreover,

prīṇāti yas sucaritaiḥ pitaraṃ sa putro
yad bhartur eva hitam icchati tat kalatram
tan mitram āpadi sukhe ca sama-kriyam yad
etat trayaṃ jagati puṇya-kṛto labhante

Whoever pleases his father by his deeds
is the real son.
Whoever desires the husband's welfare
is a wife.
A friend is one who stands by you
in trouble or in joy.
A lucky man has all three.

All these days I have treated you as my pupil, but you're no longer that. You are my intimate friend, the god I worship, my guru. In this emergency, you have stood by me and given good advice. How can I thank you enough for keeping me from doing what I wanted to? I will follow your instruction.

Pupil: Śiva, Śiva! Nārāyaṇa! A teacher shouldn't talk like this. Please forgive me if I have been at fault.

Stage manager: The Brahmin looks at the Mādiga and says:

Guru: I've never seen anyone like you.
I've seen people give food or money,
but never this kind of gift.
You said again and again that you're unclean,
but you're the purest of the pure.
I know the Vedas; I am a Brahmin.
I cannot accept this gift.

Mādiga: If I promise something to a Brahmin
and don't carry through, I will lose
all my wealth, and all my fame.
I'll get a bad name, and a load of sin.
You wanted this lovely woman
and asked for her, and I said
you could have her as a gift.
Now you say you won't take her—
but you can't escape. I will force you
to take her, I swear.

Stage manager: Now the Brahmin turns to God.

vapuḥprādur-bhāvād anumitam idam janmani purā
purâre na kvâpi kṣaṇam api bhavantaṃ praṇatavān
naman muktas sampraty aham atanur agre [']praṇatavān
itîśa kṣantavyaṃ tad idam aparādha-dvayam api

By the mere fact I have a body,
I can see that I didn't serve you
even for a second
in my last life.
Serving you now, I'll soon be free
from my body—forever.
It seems I'll never serve you
again.

Forgive me, God,
for both these failures.[29]

God, what shall I do?
I saw this Untouchable woman
and fell in love with her.
Her husband wants me to take her,
and threatens me if I won't.
My sacrifices will be wasted,
the Vedas gone.
Don't make *me* an Untouchable.
Save my honor.

Stage manager: The Mādiga also sings to God.

ātmā tvaṃ girijā matiḥ parikarāḥ prāṇāś śarīraṃ gṛham
pūjā te viṣayopabhoga-racanā nidrā samādhi-sthitiḥ
sañcāraḥ padayoḥ pradakṣiṇa-vidhis stotrāṇi sarvā giraḥ
yad yat karma karomi tat tad akhilam śambho tavârādhanam

You are my inner being.
The goddess is my mind.
My breaths are the priests,
my body is your temple.
All my pleasures
are your worship.
My sleep is deep meditation.
Wherever my feet take me,
I am circling you.
Every word of mine
is your praise.
My offering
is anything I do.

I wanted to give my wife to this little Brahmin, but he won't have her.
If he rejects my gift, lord of ghosts,
my word becomes a lie.
Don't let my giving fail,
Jaṅgama of Kŏṇḍavīḍu.[30]

29. *Subhāṣita-ratna-koṣa* 36, ascribed to Muñja and to Rāvaṇa. The third line there reads *naman janmany asminn aham atanur agre ʹpy anati-bhāvi*. This verse seems irrelevant to the present context and is apparently used here purely for its theatrical sound-value; hence it remains untranslated into Telugu.

30. Śiva at the festival in Kŏṇḍavīḍu.

If this is how it goes,
I would rather die.

So please take care of my kids.

Stage manager: The Mātaṅgi also speaks to Śiva.

My life has become miserable.
The Brahmin has turned words upside down.
My husband, with his foggy mind,
pushes me away. If I say I won't go,
he'll hit me.

The Brahmin insults me, tells me not to come.
My husband wants me to go.
The branch I was holding is broken,
and the branch I reached for is broken, too.
Help me, Śiva, with a mountain for your bow.[31]

Honor is higher than life.
A woman who has lost her honor
is worse than dead. Save me, I'm in trouble.

Stage manager: And the pupil, too, addresses God.

śivo ʹham iti bhāvayan śiva siveti codīrayan
śivaṃ hṛdi samarcayan śiva-kathās samākarṇayan
śivâtmakatayā jagat sakalam etad ālokayan
nayāmi divasān aham nayatu yatra vā māṃ śivaḥ

I pass the days, wherever Śiva takes me,
meditating on myself as Śiva,
calling out to Śiva, holding Śiva in my heart,
listening to Śiva's stories, seeing the whole world
with Śiva at its core.

Stage manager: Now that the Brahmin, his pupil, the Outcaste woman, and her husband have all invoked Śiva, the god responds and arrives on his bull, together with Pārvatī.

Śiva [*To the Mādiga*]: Listen, great Mataṅga hero.
There is no one like you in this world.
You offered to give away your wife.
What could be more fruitful?
All your sins are cleared away.

31. At the time of the war against the Triple City, Mount Meru became Śiva's bow.

Today I ordain that each year,
before this festival, you and your wife
will be remarried.[32] You two will prosper
on earth, and whoever hears this story
or sees it performed will have sons
and riches, honor and prestige
from me.

[*To the Brahmin*]: Don't worry. Don't grieve.
Your *dharma* is intact.
I am merging you into me.[33]
Even the gods will praise you.

[*To the Mādiga*]: Don't be agitated.
Your gifting will not fail.
I give you a form just like mine.[34]

[*To the Mātaṅgi*]: Why are you so dejected?
Your faithfulness is unstained.
I will give you a place close to me.[35]
My wife, Gauri, will be pleased.

[*To the student*]: Though you are still young, you saved your teacher's character.
I'm proud of you. I give you what all the gods desire—
a place in *my* world.[36]

After these gifts from god—fusion for the Brahmin, likeness in form for the Mādiga, proximity for the Mātaṅgi, and Śiva's world for the pupil—Nārada and the other musicians sang songs of conclusion.

And you, who have seen this play,
decide for yourselves and tell us:
who, among these four,
is best?

32. This line indicates that this text was performed as part of an annual ritual at Mannārkuḍi.

33. Literally, "I give you *sāyujya*"—joining into the god's being.

34. *Sārūpya.*

35. *Sāmīpya.*

36. *Sālokya.*

TWENTY-THREE

Samukhamu Veṅkaṭakṛṣṇappa Nāyaka

Late seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries

This poet, a commander of the king's army, was a product of the Madurai Nāyaka court during the rule of Vijaya-ranga Cŏkkanātha (1706–1732). His major work is the *Ahalyā-sankrandanamu,* telling of the love between Indra, king of the gods, and Ahalyā, wife of the sage Gautama; this tale of sexual violation is typical of the themes favored by Nāyaka poets.[1] Veṅkaṭakṛṣṇappa Nāyaka also composed a prose work, the *Jaimini-bhāratamu,* a Telugu version of the "counter-*Mahābhārata*" ascribed to Jaimini (previously represented in Telugu by a *kāvya* work of Pillalamarri Vīrabhadra-kavi).

THE LOVE OF INDRA AND AHALYĀ[2]

[When Brahmā created Ahalyā, the most beautiful woman in the cosmos, Indra, king of the gods, saw her and fell in love, but Brahmā married her to the crusty old sage Gautama. Ahalyā, for her part, also dreamed of the king of the gods.]

One day a Yogini, who could make impossible things happen,
came to see Ahalyā. Bowing to her, Ahalyā seated her
and asked: "Where are you going, and where do you live?
What brought you here?"

1. See discussion of this and similar works in Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nāyaka Period Tamilnadu* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 112–68.

2. Samukhamu Veṅkaṭakṛṣṇappa Nāyaka, *Ahalyā-saṅkrandanamu,* ed. Bommakanti Venkata Singaracarya and Balantrapu Nalinikanta Ravu (Madras: Emesco, 1971), 3 [selected verses].

She answered: "I live in God's world,
but I move through all worlds with my yogic power.
When Śiva and Pārvatī, or Viṣṇu and Lakṣmi,
or Brahmā and Sarasvati have trouble
in their love life, I help them make up.

Yesterday I saw Indra in his garden, and my heart
broke. He's really in bad shape.

The wishing trees, scorched by his sighs,
have turned black as a peacock's tail.
His desire, so fierce it could inflame the world,
has dried up the heavenly river.
The monsoon is nothing
compared to the tears from his eyes.
His diamond weapon has shattered in pity
at his heart-wrenching laments.
No words can describe his state.
He is lovesickness itself.

I wondered who that heartless woman is
who is causing such pain
to the king of the worlds.
So I hid behind a bush and overheard,
as Indra spoke in the unbearable pain of love:

'Why did Brahmā make her?
And why did he make me?
Why did he give her such maddening power
over me, such breathtaking charm?
Why did he put such weakness
in my mind? I can't find anyone
in the entire universe who could bring her
my message.

I can't see her even in a dream, since I cannot sleep.
I can't paint her picture, because my eyes blur with tears.
If I meditate on her, I'll go crazy.
Good god, how can I survive this torment?'

Then he painted her image on a canvas,
his body thrilling to the sight, and he held the picture
to his breast.

The woman he painted looks just like you.
Love never discriminates against anybody.
He puts everyone through pain.

Indra kisses the picture; if it doesn't kiss back,
he begs. He embraces it. If he doesn't feel
the press of breasts, he complains.
He tries to untie the knot on the sari.
When it doesn't come off, he's restless,
rolling in bed. He blames fate. Blames himself.
Blames you.

Yama and Varuṇa seek his favor.
The texts praise his beauty and his deeds.
Viṣṇu stands guard at his door.
That god of gods wants you; what a lucky woman you are!

Begging for more, scratching your cheek,
moaning and making you moan,
little tiffs and making up,
pillow talk, new ways of kissing,
twining thigh and thigh,
playing with lips, changing positions—
if a husband doesn't know how,
sex is no fun.

They wear their bodies thin in rites and fasts.
They make love silently and quickly, head covered,
face turned away in disgust, just to pay their debt
to the ancestors. These spiritual types
who torture the hearts of young, vigorous women
are no better than beasts.

'Today is new moon.'
'Today is full moon.'
'The sun enters a new constellation today.'
'This is the equinox.'
'Today is the 11th (or the 12th, or the 13th).'
'Tonight is Śivāratri.'
'I'm fasting.'
'Your fertile season is past.'
'Let it go for today.'
'Control yourself.'

Weak, cruel men have a lot of excuses
to ruin a woman's bubbling youth.
It's a sin to be married."

Ahalyā feigned anger, but she was smiling.
"How can you talk like that to me?

Do you think I'm that kind of woman?
I guess you do. You don't know me or my mind.

Did you ever see me looking at anybody else?
Have I stood near another man, or laughed with him?
What have I done? Who is Indra to me anyway?
This kind of fun—for me?
I'm living in a corner of this jungle,
and you want to bring me out into the open?

Decorating the altar, setting up the sacrifice,
gathering the oblations, bringing flowers,
fetching water for *puja*—those are tasks
for women like me. Don't take me lightly,
my friend."

The Yogini smiled mildly.
"You have full, dark hair,
breasts rising like hills,
buttocks fleshy as sandbanks.
How could I take you lightly?
You're one of the five most beautiful women
in the world.[3]

You can discipline yourself endlessly,
perform your wifely duties loyally,
fast and keep vows, go on pilgrimage—
but the pleasure of embracing a handsome,
playful man won't come
from any of the above.

When the senses stop wandering
and settle in one place,
and the mind forgets itself in a joy
that goes beyond thought:
that happiness is God.
A young woman can find it—
if she finds the right lover.

3. The list of these five women (*pañca-kanyā*) includes Ahalyā, Draupadi, Tāra (Bṛhaspati's wife), Tāra (Vālin's wife), and Maṇḍodari (Rāvaṇa's wife). Note, however, that Ahalyā joins this list only *after* the events described here! A popular Sanskrit verse says that if one reads their stories constantly, all sins will be dissolved (*ahalyā drauapadī tārā tārā mandodarī yatha/pañca-kanyāḥ paṭher nityaṃ sarva-pāpa-vināśanam*). The irony of the verse lies in the fact that all five women are said, in popular tradition, to have had extramarital affairs.

To be alive is a rare gift.
To be born a human being is the best result
of many good deeds. And to be born a woman
is luckier still, for women have extra desire
and pleasure in sex. If you don't fulfill it,
that's a sin, a kind of suicide. There's nothing worse.

Dupe the mother-in-law, hoodwink the husband,
take the blame if need be, do whatever it takes
to meet the lover you want and explode
in pleasure: if a woman won't do this,
what's the point of being young? Why be born?

Why be sad? The lord of the universe
is in love with you. Can't you see how good it is?
You're sitting on a fortune. Cash in on it,
don't be helpless. I know your heart.
You gain nothing by being chaste."

A gentle light spread over Ahalyā's face.
Shyly, she bent her head and said,
with a sweet voice:

"Are these thatched forest sheds
golden palaces with painted pictures?
Is this hermitage the kind of thoroughfare
that Indra likes, where gods mingle with other
marvelous beings? And these wild trees,
are they anything like those that fulfill all wishes
in Indra's heaven? The antelope and deer
are quite unlike majestic elephants.
And as for me, I'm nothing like Indrāṇi,
his elegant, accomplished wife. There's no way Indra
could love me. Kings just look for a new taste.

Anyway, a woman shouldn't think of anyone
except the husband who took her hand.
You must be very courageous to speak like this.
But it isn't proper."

The Yogini laughed, stroking Ahalyā's hair.
"My word is as good as the Veda. I never lie.
At the very moment you were created,[4] Indra

4. In this text, Ahalyā was created as a fully mature woman.

took your hand. If you don't believe me,
ask your husband: he was there.

Don't you know that the ancient texts refer to Indra
as "Ahalyā's lover"?[5]

Hearing this, Ahalyā felt the stirrings of desire
for Indra, but she thought, with fear,
of her husband. She couldn't say yes or no,
and her heart was tossed back and forth.

"When the sharp arrows of Desire
strike the most vulnerable spots
and longing grows, only to die in the heart,
a woman should turn herself to stone
and give up all thought of pleasure.
Can a woman move from her place
once she has shown her body to one man?

Like a pot of money reflected in a mirror,
or fruit beyond reach on the tree,
or the sandalwood tree circled by an angry serpent,[6]
or fine food laced with deadly poison,
a married woman can't easily be touched.
So stop spinning dreams: just go tell Indra.

If a handsome man comes anywhere near the house,
the father-in-law begins to burn.
If you visit your mother for more than half a day,
your mother-in-law cuts you like a knife.
If you spend a minute or two at the neighbors',
your sister-in-law pinches you like pincers.
Even when you get your period, you're not allowed out of sight.[7]
Younger sisters-in-law are tale-bearing whores.
Your co-wives are so jealous they gossip all the time.
The brother-in-law wreaks vengeance.
For a married woman who wants to take a lover,
her husband's house is a prison.

5. Quoting, anachronistically, the Vedic epithet: *ahalyāyai jāraḥ*.

6. Folk belief asserts that the sandalwood tree is always covered by snakes, who prevent access; for this reason, one never actually attains real sandalwood but only wood from neighboring trees, impregnated with the sandalwood fragrance.

7. Among Brahmins, menstruating women are not allowed to stay in the house for three days.

My husband keeps close watch on me.
I don't know what's in his mind.
No one can come or go in this house
to do it here.

There was that woman Tāra and her lover, the Moon.[8]
They were lucky. Who else has that kind of courage?
Neither men nor women.

Tell him to give up these thoughts of me.
Who am I to him?
Ask him to contain the pain of love
for once, as I do.

Tell him I love him. I think of him all the time.
Tell him I'm in bed with him, always,
in my mind.

You're like my mother: why should I hide anything
from you? When once in a while my old husband
makes love to me, I close my eyes
and pretend he is Indra.

It's time to light the evening fire. Go now,"
she said. So the Yogini left as the sun set,
as if unwilling to look at this woman any more.

That night, Gautama, disciplined in yoga,
exhausted by long recitation,
spread his antelope skin beneath a tree

and lay down to sleep. Ahalyā, a bit aroused,
touched him with her fingernails
as if intending to massage his feet.
"Woman, it's sixteen days since your period.
The time is over. Why break the rule
for nothing?" he said.

She began to think: "If only
Indra were here. He would know
my mood and satisfy me."
But she said to the sage,

8. The story of Tāra, the wife of the sage Bṛhaspati, and her lover Candra was, like that of Ahalyā and Indra, popular in the Nāyaka period. See *Tārā-śasâṅka-vijayamu* of Śeṣamu Veṅkaṭapati, and discussion in *Symbols of Substance*.

"Don't worry. I'm not thinking of *that*.
I just came to sleep at your feet."
But she was angry, and turned her face away.
He, on the other hand, sank at once
into an ocean of deep serenity.

Meanwhile, the king of the gods
knew, through yogic powers—
that is, the Yogini's report—
of Ahalyā's painful state. He thanked
the Yogini for her skillful handling
of the matter and accepted the mission
of love. He knew he had to venture[9]
making love to her secret,

so he become a cock and crowed, "*Kokkarokko!*"
The sage woke up, chanting God's names.[10]
Without checking the time, he quickly went off
to the river to bathe.

Indra appeared now as Gautama and,
urgent in the dense darkness,
took Ahalyā's hand.

"Young woman," he said, "that wasn't the morning call.
The cock was thinking of his mate. There's most of the night,
still, before dawn. Come to bed."

Doubt arose in her heart. She smiled and thought,
"This must be Indra or someone like him
in the guise of the sage, come to take me.
This is not my husband." Fear, love, and a gentle charm
combined as she held his hand and said,

"Earlier, when I was tortured by my thoughts,
you said, in a stern voice, that the time was past—
that it wasn't right. You sent me away.
Why are you begging for it now?
Who are you? Don't lie to me."

"I'm the one who took your hand before,
in Brahmā's presence. Don't you recognize me?

9. Reading, with the editors, *saṃyogamu sāhasa-kriya prayogamu seyaka ḳuḍadu.**
10. Literally, "thinking of Vāmana" (the dwarf avatar of Viṣṇu).

No sin will come to that person
who has vowed to make love every day,
or any day, no matter what, in or out of season."

She understood his double meaning, knew
he was Indra come to embrace her.
She wanted to talk to him and see him.

"The old man has never shown me
so much love. You're not my husband.
I don't know who you are. I won't stand for it
if you force me into it without showing me
who you are. If you beg for buttermilk,
why hide the pot?"

A gold-embroidered shawl on his shoulders,
necklaces of pearl, golden bracelets and armlets,
garlands of flowers from the wishing tree, fragrance
of camphor and musk: Indra stood before her
in his own body, the very form of love.

She saw him, his body glowing. Sweat broke out
all over, and her hairs stood on end.
Trembling with excitement, she offered up to him the looks
that slipped sideways from her dark eyes.

"My lord," she said, "lover of Śaci,[11]
what brings you here?"
"To drink in your beauty."
"What beauty is there in a forest girl?"
"Who cares where a jewel is embedded?"
"You're just saying that out of kindness."
"I swear by the Love God that it's true."
"But why did you come dressed like my husband?"
"So you could be a wife.

Let me kiss you now, to wash away
the insipid aftertaste of ambrosia.
I'm tired of my golden mountain;
just let me touch your splendid breasts.
I'm bored with the blossoms from the wish-giving tree;
let me lie in your soft embrace.

11. Indrāṇi, Indra's consort.

I want to study the movements of your thighs;
help me forget the dull hours wasted with Rambha.[12]
Too long have my hands clutched the huge temples
of my regal elephant; they crave to stroke your bottom."

And he fell at her feet, brushing them with his golden crown,
studded with gems, and he wouldn't get up.
"My lord," she said, "it isn't right for you to bow to me.
Please get up. You are my god and my king."
She raised him, bringing his chest close to her burning breasts.

He hung on to her hands and pressed against her breasts,
as if she were a raft that would bear him across the vast ocean
of his hunger, or as a jasmine vine coils around a sweet mango tree.[13]
He was intoxicated at the gentle comfort of her touch.

After a little while, she pushed him with her breasts,
and he, thrilling, tried to kiss her, greedily.
She turned away a little. "Come to the bedroom,"
she said. "But there are some conditions to be fulfilled."

Holding his hand, she led him to the bed of flowers.
She sat him down, thigh touching thigh, and said
in mellifluous tones:

"I'll scratch you on your face,
but you're not allowed to scratch my breasts.
I'll bite your lip, but you can't bruise mine.
I'll run my fingers through your hair, but you must not
pull my braid. I'll cover your throat with musk,
but you're not allowed to smear my body.
You can moan as much as you want, but I won't utter a sound.
If you agree to all the above, my kingly lover,
I'll go where you want to go."

He smiled. "Agreed," he said, certain
that all the rules in the world
would be washed away when they got to bed.
He held her, and she pressed against him.
He kissed her lips. She scratched his cheeks.
The battle began.

12. One of the ravishing *apsaras*-courtesans of the gods.

13. Note that here Indra is compared to the vine, almost always a feminine image in Indian poetry.

Burning with eagerness to begin, they were maddened by the heavy perfumes of sandal and musk. She was as if possessed by hunger for him, but also held back by shyness she couldn't shake, and as she struggled, he gathered her up in his embrace, but she slipped away; he reached for her full, luscious breasts, and she pushed away his hand; he tried to stroke her hair, black as night, but she shook him off; he scratched at her smooth cheek, and she turned her head; he sucked at her lower lip, streaming with the sweetness of heaven, but she averted the kiss. He tried to touch the golden palace of love, softer than the most delicate of flowers, yet she was still not ready, and stopped him, but he tricked her into forgetting and carried her to the bed of blossoms. He cajoled her, held her, embraced her, warned her, twined himself into her, hand to hand, hair to hair, moving toward *that,* untying the knot on her sari, kissing her right through her lips, mounting her, and she was moaning and murmuring sweet throat-sounds like the cuckoo in its cry, and they were calling out to each other yes, more, good, don't stop, their bodies pressed against one another, inventing new names, never known before, their eyes half-closed as they reached toward the highest point of love, which is infinite.

"When did you learn to murmur like the dove's cooing?
When did you practice so many ways of kissing?
Where did you learn how to use your fingernails to give delight?
When did you learn to revel in the battle of love?
You're the simple wife of that dried-up old man, living in a corner of the world,
yet you have all this expertise!" More and more excited, he praised her,

as her braid danced like a whip cracked by the Love God, to keep her going,
and her pearls scattered like flowers raining down on the battlefield,
and she was crying out as if Desire were playing his haunting melodies,
and sweat flowed like the water that crowns the King and Queen of Love,
and half-closing her eyes in meditation on the supreme god, who is passion,
she made love from on top, like a man.

Their senses became one.
The world disappeared.

There was neither "I" nor "you."
There was nothing but joy beyond words,
unbroken, unknown to the watching self,
perfect and infinite and full and flowing
into one another.

She looked outside, quickly and now alone,
and gently called to him, to send him off
with care. "When will we meet?" he asked her.
"Is this the end?

What is there to say? I can't bring myself
to say good-bye. If I try to go, my feet won't move.
But I can't stay. Your husband will soon return.
There's nothing left for us, no way for me to come again."

"I trust you," she said. "I've given you my body.
Now you're leaving me to burn with longing.
Maybe you *can* go, somehow or other, but I can't tell you
to go—and even if I could, I couldn't live without you."

She kept repeating this, at the same time
hugging him tightly and kissing him.
Finally, she sent him off. As he tried to steal away,
looking this way and that, Gautama suddenly appeared.

He was red with rage like the burning sun.
"Indra," he said, cursing him,
"blinded by the pride that comes of too much muscle,
you took my form and took my wife. For this,
you'll wander without testicles."

Then he entered his house and angrily called his wife.
Humbly, her courage gone, her heart beating fast,
she stood before him, with water for his feet.

He looked at her in fury: "I won't touch water
from your hands. Deceitful woman that you are,
you wanted Indra and slept with him last night.
Your body will be turned to stone."

She staggered and shivered, falling at her husband's feet.
"Tell me when the curse will end," she begged.

"Viṣṇu will be born as Rāma, son of Daśaratha,
to contain Rāvaṇa and other demons.

He will kill Tāṭaka at Viśvāmitra's command.[14]
He will save the sacrifice and marry Sīta.
When that great hero passes this way,
he will bring your curse to a close
with the dust of his feet."

[Gautama went off to the Himâlayas, leaving Ahalyā behind in the form of a stone. In course of time, Rāma passed by the deserted ashram, together with Viśvāmitra. He asked the sage to explain why the site was desolate, and Viśvāmitra replied:]

"Gautama lived here, a hermit famous for his discipline
throughout the worlds. This is a place
where troubles are removed. You can see it, come.
There is something interesting here for you."

Rāma walked along, looking here and there.
Particles of dust from his delicate feet
touched the stone.

Slowly softening,
then, after a little while,
becoming rounded,
growing fuller, melting a little more,
now lengthening and stretching,
that rock took on beauty, charm,
a delightful, disconcerting form
radiant with youth
until at last she stood there,
a jewel of a woman
and a miracle to the mind.

Rāma looked at her feet and bowed to her,
the hermit's wife. Her blessings filled his heart.
He was smiling, too, through the down of his mustache.[15]

And Gautama, noting that moment,
arrived quickly from the mountains
to rejoin his wife.

Rāma took leave of the sage,
who praised him, and went on to Mithila city.

14. Tāṭaka was a demoness destroyed by Rāma while wandering in the forest to safeguard Viśvāmitra's sacrifice.

15. Rāma at this point is still hardly more than a boy.

From that time on, Gautama and Ahalyā,
with love in their hearts and their troubles behind them,
gave themselves to joyful play, rich in invention.
Their passion unabated, they lived forever
in immeasurable pleasure.

To all who read this story, or hear it,
or copy it cleanly,[16] the generous Lord of Śrīraṅgam[17]
gives great gifts.

16. This warning has not gone unheeded by modern editors of our text, who consistently replace delicate passages with ellipses.

17. Raṅganātha-Viṣṇu, the author's personal deity, who appeared to him in a dream and commissioned this poem (as narrated in the opening canto). The final verse follows the standard format of *phala-śruti,* the promise of reward to those who read or hear the text.

TWENTY-FOUR

Muddupaḷani

Mid–eighteenth century

In Nāyaka and Maratha Tañjāvūr, women were prominent literati. Raṅgājamma, the courtesan-wife of Vijayarāghava Nāyaka, composed several virtuoso works, which also attest to her knowledge of many languages (this multilingualism was taken for granted in the courtly life of this period). A century later we find the poetess Muddupaḷani, a courtesan at the court of the Maratha king of Tañjāvūr, Pratāpa Singh (1739–63), to whom she dedicated her book, *Rādhikā-sāntvanamu.* The work must have enjoyed a considerable popularity through the nineteenth century, for a Telugu scholar employed by C. P. Brown, Paidipati Venkata Narusu, wrote a commentary on it. By the end of the nineteenth century, such works were, however, already proscribed by the government, determined by Victorian moral standards to be obscene.

Muddupaḷani's *śṛṅgāra-kāvya*—an elaborate love poem on the theme of Kṛṣṇa's love for his new wife Iḷa and the consequent jealousy of his senior wife, Rādha—offers a rich expression of a woman's sensibility and self-perception in the domain of sexuality. Such a focus is not unique to women poets of this period, since male poets, too, adopted a female voice: Kṣetrayya is a major example. Muddupaḷani's poetry is, on the whole, very close to that of such poets, although not of the same caliber. She is interesting in her own right for the unmediated articulation of a courtesan's view of love and for the inventiveness she brought to bear upon a rather routinized Kṛṣṇa theme.

Following the model of Kṛṣṇadevarāya, Muddupaḷani reports that Kṛṣṇa came to her in a dream as a little boy and asked her to compose this work on "appeasing Rādhika." She reported her dream to her guru, Vīrarāghavadeśika, in the company of other scholars, and they confirmed the revelation and advised her to compose the book and dedicate it to the god. Muddupa-

ḷani also cleverly puts her own family genealogy in the mouths of these pandits, in the preface to her book; as a courtesan, she was reluctant to describe her family herself, as other poets usually did. It remains striking that this courtesan proudly displays a publicly accessible genealogy fit for a king.

HOW TO READ A BOOK[1]

When you are reading, and you come to a thorn,
pull it out. Use your knowledge
to heal the book. Don't meddle with poets
who make a living out of finding fault.
They're bad news.

RĀDHA INSTRUCTS IḶA, KṚṢṆA'S NEW BRIDE, IN THE ARTS OF LOVE[2]

[Rādha has dressed up the young bride, while Kṛṣṇa waits in the bedroom.]

"How will the lips of this young girl
suffer his bites? He is the killer of the demon Kaiṭabha.
How will her breasts bear his clawing? He's a lion of a cowherd.
Can her tender thighs take his vigor? He wrestled Cāṇūra to the death.
Will her smooth body survive? He's an elephant-killer."

All the women were joking like this, and Iḷa bowed her head
in shyness, her face all red. Rādhika drew close to her
and offered comfort:

"When your husband holds you,
push him gently with your breasts.
If he kisses your cheek, touch his lips with yours.
When he gets on top of you, move against him from below.
If he gets tired while making love, quickly take over
and get on top. He's the best lover, a real connoisseur,
extremely delicate. Love him skillfully,
and make him love you. That's my advice.
But you know best.

Loving has its own laws." And she taught her.
Then she said, "Go quickly. The good hour

1. Muddupaḷani, *Rādhikā-sāntvanamu* (Madras: Emesco, 1972) *Avatārika* 6.
2. Ibid., 1.65–68, 70–71, 74–76.

is passing. Meet your lover. Don't delay."
And she led her gently to Kṛṣṇa, and said to him:

"Her breasts are tender as young buds. Unlike mine,
they won't hold up if you claw at them.
Her lips are like leaves. Mine are full-blown coral.
Don't bite too hard.
My thighs are used to wrestling with you,
but hers are soft as bananas.
Her whole body is a fragile vine. Mine is tough
as gold. In a word, she's not me.
Not equal to you in love.
Innocent. New to the art.
You have to know how to handle her.
Do you need me to tell you?
You're good with women.

Just touch her lips with the tip of your tongue.
Don't squeeze.
Kiss her cheeks lightly.
Don't scratch.
Caress her nipples with your fingertips.
Don't crush.
Make love very, very gently.
Don't be wild.
I must be crazy to talk like this.
When you and she are deeply in it,
wrestling with each other,
these rules of mine won't hold."

Then she handed Iḷa over to Kṛṣṇa.
But really she wanted to come too,
and held on to Iḷa's sari. Iḷa loosened her fingers:
"I'll be back soon," she said.
And Rādha went, her mind a jumble
of misery and joy.

Lying on her bed, alone, she thought to herself:

"You can give money.
You can give away your own family.
You can give your very life, that isn't easy to give up.
But to give your own husband
to another woman—what woman can do that?

By now I'm sure she's sucking at his delicious lips.
Or already pounding his naked chest with her breasts.
Probably moaning like doves.
He's on top of her, and she's pressing against him.
She's quite skilled to begin with. Maybe a bit shy,
but by now he's won her over, freed her
from any reticence. He's brought her close,
touched her everywhere. Taught her everything."

She kept thinking. Tortured by love,
she couldn't close her eyes.
Inside her, she was burning.
As for Kṛṣṇa, he was busy
with the girl.

TWENTY-FIVE

Tyāgarāja

1767–1847

Born in 1767 in Tiruvārūr in the Kāveri Delta, in the Tamil heartland, to Rāmabrahmamu and Sītamma, this poet and devotee of Rāma is among the most outstanding names in the history of Carnatic music. (He was an older contemporary of the great composer Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar [1776–1835], who also lived in this small Tamil town.) His great-grandfather emigrated to Tiruvārūr from the Kurnool area in the early seventeenth century; Tyāgarāja's grandfather, Girirājakavi, was patronized by King Śāhāji of Tañjāvūr. Sītamma, the poet's mother, is said to have taught her son to sing the *padams* of Jayadeva, Purandaradāsa, and Annamâcārya. The boy wrote his first compositions, in *padam* form, on the walls of his house; his father copied them down and showed them to scholars, who advised that they be saved. He then studied with a great musician, Śoṇṭhi Venkaṭaramaṇayya, with connections to the court of Tulajāji.

In the eyes of the tradition, Tyāgarāja fits the pattern of the temple poet—poor, surviving by begging, and completely oriented toward his chosen deity, Rāma. He is said to have rejected invitations and gifts from King Serfoji II as well as from the king of Travancore, Svāti Tirunāḷ. Like other itinerant singers, Tyāgarāja traveled to other temples and composed music for their gods. Tradition ascribes to him some 14,000 *kīrtanas,* of which about six hundred survive. He was inventive in expressive forms; among his surviving works are sustained "operatic" compositions (*saṅgīta-nāṭakas*), the *Nauka-caritramu,*[1] *Sītā-rāma-vijayamu,* and *Prahlāda-bhakta-vijayamu.* This was also a period in which musical composition was being fixed in written form. Despite the trend in modern performance to give primacy to the

1. Recently translated by Y. Bhagavathi, *Tyāgarāja's Nauka caritramu* (Madras: Sarvani Sageetha Sabha Trust, 1995).

purely musical side of Tyāgarāja, revealing his elaborate workmanship, his verbal and poetic achievement is no less striking: each song is also capable of standing as a poem, with its own compositional integrity and linguistic expressivity.

According to the tradition, Tyāgarāja was informed by the god, in a dream, of the date of his death in 1847. He died fully aware and still composing poetry, surrounded by disciples singing his songs; he is buried (as a renouncer) on the banks of the Kāveri at Tiruvaiyāṟu.

I CAN'T SEE YOUR SMILE[2]

I can't see your smile,
and I'm sad. You know it, too.
Can't you help me?

You are surrounded by courtiers.
Don't they give you good advice?

I can't see your smile.

And there's that bird you ride. Can't he bring you here now,
if you tell him to? Or did he say it's too far
from heaven to earth? You rule the world.
Who else could hear my complaint?
Don't play games with me.
I can't bear it. Take me.
Tyāgarāja sings to you.

I can't see your smile.

TAKE ME FOR YOUR GUARD[3]

Take me for your guard.

I'll do the job. I'll kill Desire
and other raging foes, if you

take me for your guard.

Bristling hair for armor,
"Servant of Rāma" on my nameplate,

2. Tyāgarāja, *Śrī tyāgarājasvāmi kīrtanalu* (Madras: Ummadi Srirangamma, 1982), 3 [*nagu momu ganaleni nā jāli tĕlisi*], 304, 294, 314, 27, 50.

3. *Baṇṭurīti kŏluviyyavayya rāma.*

and your name for my weapon.
That's all Tyāgarāja wants—

to be your guard.

WHAT DID YOU GIVE THEM?[4]

What did you give them?
The happiness they asked for?

When Sīta asked for a boon,
she had to go to the forest.
When the demoness[5] desired you,
she ended up losing her nose.

What did you give them?

Nārada sought understanding,
and he was turned into a woman.
Durvāsas wanted food,
and lost his appetite.[6]

What did you give them?

Devaki asked for a son,
and Yaśoda got one.
The cowgirls begged for love,
and they had to leave their husbands.

What did you give them?

Who knows if you'll give or not?
The secret's out. Why play games?
Tyāgarāja sings for you.

What did you give them?

REACH HIM THROUGH MUSIC[7]

Reach him through music,
reach him through love.
There is no other path.

4. *Aḍigi sukhamul′ ĕvvar′ anubhaviñciri rā.*
5. Śūrpaṇakha, who fell in love with Rāma and tried to seduce him in the forest.
6. *Mandam′ ayĕ.*
7. *Saṅgīta-jñānamu bhakti vinā sanmārgamu galade manasā.*

Bhṛṅgin,[8] Naṭeśa,[9] Hanuman, Agastya,
Mātaṅga, and Nārada
all knew how
to reach him through music,
reach him through love.

The world is a game.
Some things are fair, some unfair.
There are enemies in the body,
six violent passions,[10]
but there is a way to defeat them.
Tyāgarāja knows.

Reach him through music,
reach him through love.

WON'T YOU REMOVE THE SCREEN?[11]

Won't you remove the screen?
The one that hangs inside me.
The one called greed.

It's keeping out good sense and freedom.
Won't you remove the screen
inside me?

The hungry fish swallowed the hook.
The lamp is masked by a shade.
The dinner was perfect, until the fly fell in.
The mind in contemplation shifted to the slums.
Deer run straight into the trap.
Tyāgarāja remembers you.

Won't you remove the screen?

8. The three-legged dancemaster of Śiva's heaven.
9. Śiva as Lord of the Dance (at Cidambaram).
10. Lust, anger, greed, confusion, arrogance, and envy.
11. *Tĕra tiyyaga rādā.*

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